

When you're young, studying abroad is the quickest, easiest route to building a strong International IQ. A semester or year abroad can be absolutely life-changing. Nowadays, study abroad is also becoming crucial to ensure your professional success after graduation. The skills you build by heading abroad are highly applicable in almost any workplace environment and today's employers are on the hunt for candidates with demonstrable international experience.

Over the past few years, study abroad has become an essential part of the college experience. While abroad, you'll broaden your horizons by gaining insight into a foreign culture; you'll challenge yourself by stepping outside your comfort zone; you'll make connections with people you never expected to meet; and you'll acquire countless new skills that you'll use for the rest of your life. In the past, opportunities were restricted to the wealthy; but with the strong US dollar, significant decreases in the cost of air travel, and the increasing amount of financial support for adventures abroad, international study has never been more accessible.

You'll Learn So Much!

Any student returning from study abroad will be the first to tell you that learning isn't restricted to the classroom. You will learn so much just by experiencing the day-to-day routines of your host country. Stay open-minded and observant, you'll automatically gain a deep understanding of your host culture, getting a sense of the dominant values, politics and cultural traits. Another underemphasized benefit is that you'll also gain insight into North American cultural values, and be forced to examine your own culture from a whole new perspective.

Your Career Gets a Big Boost

You've probably heard it mentioned, or maybe it's even the reason you're thinking of going abroad: study abroad is now a crucial component of your career preparation. Our world is becoming ever more globalized, and even small businesses now work across international borders. Language skills, creative problem-solving skills, cultural sensitivity, adaptability, self-knowledge and an international perspective are now requirements for success in many modern workplaces. Whether you plan on working for a major international firm, or opening a local business in your hometown, the skills you build by studying abroad are guaranteed to boost your future career.

The Right Attitude

Now that we've hinted at the benefits of study abroad, let's take a look at your approach to the study abroad process. In order to build your all-important international skills, you'll need to take control of your experiences and focus on goals instead of challenges; you might even have to look beyond the minor worries of family members or friends. Many students get caught up in the reasons they shouldn't go abroad, rather than just biting the bullet and committing to the experience. Don't wait for circumstances to be perfect, and don't put off until tomorrow what can be done today – take action, make plans and go abroad! The risks are well worth the rewards!

Tap Into Your School's Resources

Your school has advisors and administrators whose primary goal is to help you go abroad and have a career-boosting, eye-opening experience. These professionals have helped many other students, and they know the ins and outs of your school's study abroad options. Take advantage of it!

Don't Let the News Stop You

Lately, media outlets have been broadcasting some unsettling news stories from around the world. Although it's important to stay on top of the news and to be aware of government travel advisories, it's certainly not necessary to avoid studying abroad due to fear. Millions of students from around the world continue to study abroad, and enjoy enriching cultural experiences. By studying abroad, you'll be challenging yourself to step beyond the news and to instead experience the world for what it is – most often a welcoming, exciting and inspirational place.

Share Your Culture

Arrive abroad ready to learn about your host culture, and ready to share your thoughts about your own. Take a couple of hours to read up on your own culture. Read about how North Americans organize work, how we behave in groups, etc. Tuning in to another culture is much easier when you're first aware of your own. Think about the stereotypes that you hold and the stereotypes that foreigners might hold about you. Be open-minded, and be willing to share your culture as you immerse yourself in another.

Choosing a School: The Basic Questions

As soon as you've decided to study abroad, you'll probably be excited and want to rush forward with your decision. But keep in mind that a little bit of self-reflection can help you choose an ideal study abroad program. Take a look at the following list of questions and note down your responses. This will help you target your ideal study abroad programs.

- What do you hope to gain from studying abroad?
- What world regions are you interested in?
- Are your career goals related to any particular region?
- Do you want to live in a dorm, with a host family or in an off-campus apartment?
- Do you want to improve your language skills while abroad?
- Do you want to go abroad for a year, a semester, or short-term?
- Do you want to be in an urban centre or in a small town?
- How important is your academic credit to your international experience?
- Are you comfortable traveling independently?
- What extra-curricular, volunteer or work-related activities would you ideally like to undertake during your time abroad?
- How important is the quality of resources and campus services?
- How important is academic credit?

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Types of Programs

Academic Year or Semester Abroad: Most North American colleges have established study abroad or exchange programs that allow you to accumulate credits while overseas. Because of the increasing value of study abroad, and its relevance to career success after graduation, some universities are now making study abroad a requirement. Options vary greatly from university to university, so get in contact with your study abroad office or international center as soon as possible to see what's available. In terms of academic planning, many advisors suggest that students study abroad during the third year of a four-year program. We think that any year is good, and that the earlier you begin building international experiences, the better.

Graduate Study Abroad: Colleges and universities abroad openly welcome foreign nationals for graduate-level degree programs; costs are often low and the language of instruction is often in English. In addition, there are many more scholarships and bursaries open to graduate students than undergrads. Even if you are enrolled in a North American university for your graduate degree, the opportunities to study abroad are numerous. Even if your post-grad program doesn't have international requirements, you can work with your professors to focus on an international topic.

Summer & Intersession Programs: Short programs abroad are perfect for those who prefer not to interrupt their academic year. Your school may offer summer or intersession programs abroad, or you can contact one of many external agencies that offer short-term experiences. These trips tend to focus on cultural learning or language; but keep in mind that classes like this are usually comprised of North Americans like yourself and, hence, may not be as beneficial from a cross-cultural point of view.

Studies in Developing Countries: For the more adventurous students, enrolling in a developing world university can be an incredible cross-cultural learning experience. Those who have lived in developing countries know that they often have particularly rich and vibrant cultures, and that locals are eager to engage with visitors. This option can be challenging, but when you return home, you'll have a really unique study abroad experience to highlight when speaking with future employers.

Full Degree Abroad: More and more students are opting to complete entire degrees abroad. This requires adaptability and open-mindedness, but provides a unique opportunity for long-term immersion. With rising tuition rates in North America, this option can also be financially attractive. Cost-conscious North Americans should review the [Academic Ranking Of World Universities \(ARWU\)](#) list to uncover affordable programs worldwide.

The objective in all these scenarios is not to gain college credits but to gain life credits. Understanding and perspective have huge value.

The Application Process

The application process for each study abroad program is different. Some require an extensive selection of materials to be submitted, including a letter of intent, application essay, resume, transcript and additional forms. Other programs simply require you to submit a statement of interest. Review the requirements carefully and completely.

Almost all study abroad programs require an application essay or statement of interest. The essay is your chance to showcase your personality, discuss your motivations for going abroad and highlight your professional and academic goals. Outstanding application essays share one thing in common: enthusiasm. Students with lower GPAs have been admitted to programs because of their excellent personal statements. Your essay can make or break your application. If it is well-written, it can highlight your personality, uniqueness, self-awareness and ambitions.

Start Preparations Early

Our biggest recommendation for anyone considering a study abroad term is to plan well in advance. Do plenty of research through your school and with online ratings sites like [AbroadReviews](#), [GoAbroad](#) and [Abroad101](#). Give yourself ample time to create a strong application, save money, learn the language, obtain passports and visas, and to confirm vaccine and immunization lead times. Check all requirements with your study abroad advisor.

Financing Your Travels

Going abroad to study can be an expensive proposition, but don't let the cost deter you from pursuing your dream of building high-value international experience. You can offset costs by saving up, or by applying for awards, scholarships or grants. Many universities offer study abroad scholarship funds; or you could ask about applying your financial aid to the study abroad journey. There are also plenty of alternative money-making options, like starting an online fundraiser, taking a side job, or searching for independent scholarships online.

The most important thing you can do to secure funds is to start collecting them early. Many funding opportunities have lengthy lead times, requiring you to submit various types of paperwork and to have an exact budget prepared for your study abroad adventure. The whole process will require you to do independent background research, careful planning and lots of follow-up. But although it might be a lot of work to get your finances in order, you will not regret it!

Pre-departure

Ask lots of questions, do lots of research, get your finances in order and beef up your language skills. The effort you make before leaving will make a big difference once you land abroad. Do everything you can to choose the perfect program, and ask study abroad alumni about their experiences to mentally prepare for the adventure ahead. Pre-departure is a crucial part of your study abroad journey – so enjoy it!

Study Abroad Is so Much More Than a Holiday

The difference between a fun study abroad term and a life-changing one lies in your attitude. At *MyWorldAbroad*, we speak from experience when we say that your perspective and motivation is everything. Choose to become a cross-cultural adventurer; choose to take every opportunity to immerse yourself in your foreign environment; choose to add career value by seeking out additional positions, extracurriculars and networking opportunities. Don't fall into the trap of hanging out with friends from home, sticking to the tourist sites and partying. There is so much more, and you'll forever thank yourself for diving in!

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