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The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

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THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON POST-GRADUATION JOB SEARCH

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PIM 64

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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ABSTRACT

Following the tradition of a case study, this capstone research investigates the experience of recent graduates of the City University of New York (CUNY) who participated in study abroad programs managed by the College of Staten Island (CSI) between Fall 2010 and Summer 2015 and examines their perceptions of the post-graduation job search process. The data was collected through an online survey of 72 CUNY graduates and interviews with four survey respondents.

The research findings did not show that the employment rate of CUNY study abroad alumni were any better or worse than others. However, many alumni believed that their international experience helped or could help them to land a job regardless of the professions they were pursuing. The research results also suggest that CUNY study abroad alumni thought that “soft skills” such as communication skills, ability to work with others, problem-solving skills, adaptability, maturity, flexibility, independence, open-mindedness, motivation, and self-awareness gained through study abroad experience, rather than technical skills and knowledge such as language skills or academic and professional knowledge, helped them to get a job. They also felt that study abroad added a unique value to their resumes.

The findings from this research support results from similar studies, which have been done in different institutional or cultural contexts in the past about the professional impact of the study abroad experience. It offers ideas for study abroad programming and advisement, as well as career advisement, so students can more efficiently gain those skills which can help them become more marketable job seekers and effectively use study abroad experience as a tool for career development.

INTRODUCTION

Background Information and Research Question

The job market for young college graduates continues to be unfavorable in the United States following the Great Recession in 2007. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) reported that, as a consequence of the Great Recession, the unemployment rate for young college graduates increased from 5.5 percent in 2007 to 8.5 percent in 2014 due to a weak labor market (p. 10; Shierholz, Davis, and Kimball, 2014). In such an economic climate, colleges and universities in the United States emphasize the importance of equipping their graduates with the skills and experience through their curriculum and programs that will help them to be more employable after graduation. Students are constantly encouraged to do more in college than just completing a degree to set themselves apart from other college graduates in a competitive job market. From the moment they step into the college, they are immediately and continuously introduced to various kinds of activities and programs available on campus and are reminded to participate in student clubs and campus leadership opportunities, do an internship, engage in undergraduate research, participate in community services, and so on.

Study abroad is one of those activities that many colleges believe that students should do before they graduate. In an effort to advocate for expanding education abroad opportunities, NAFSA Association of International Education (n.d.) identifies career advancement as one of the six benefits of studying abroad. Both study abroad and career advisement professionals often say that study abroad can help students build their resumes. In my most recent employment position as a Study Abroad Advisor at the College of Staten Island (CSI)/The City University of New York (CUNY),

I, myself, also used this argument to convey the benefit of study abroad to students and their parents and to encourage their participation in study abroad programs.

As a matter of fact, my own study abroad experience in the United States and in China helped me to get a job as an international educator because it was a natural fit. However, graduates of CUNY go into various fields, which may not necessarily require international experience. This brings up an important question for international educators to look into - is study abroad really helping students, regardless of their majors, to land a job in this competitive job market, or is it merely a myth which we would like to believe is true?

This research investigates the question of what the post-graduation job search experiences are for CUNY study abroad program participants. The findings from this research of actual students' experience and perspectives reveal if studying abroad truly increases CUNY graduates' employability and helps them to be more marketable in their job searches.

Institutional Background

CUNY is a public urban university which consists of 24 senior and community colleges, graduate and professional schools, and research centers. In addition to 269,000 matriculated students in degree-seeking programs, there are 247,000 students in continuing and professional programs (The City University of New York, n.d.). It has a mission to respond to the needs of New York City's urban environment, and one of its mandated missions is to be "of vital importance as a vehicle for the upward mobility of the disadvantaged in the City of New York."

One of the unique characteristics of CUNY's student body is that 78.8 percent of the students are local coming from the various boroughs of New York City (The City

University of New York Office of Institutional Research and Advancement, 2015). It is predominantly a commuter school, and many students commute from home where they live with their family members. In the Fall of 2014, 37 percent of the student body was born outside of the mainland United States, and of those, 42 percent are first generation college students (The City University of New York Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2015). There are substantial numbers of non-traditional college aged students, as well as part-time students. Twenty-seven percent of undergraduate students are 25 years and older, and 35 percent are part-time students.

As far as the students' economic background goes, 38.5 percent of the students come from a family with a household income of less than \$20,000, and 57.9 percent of the students receive a Federal Pell Grant. Affordable tuition, \$6,330 per year, which is among the nation's lowest, is one of the major reasons students choose CUNY, as many students come from a financially difficult background. Therefore, cost is one of the major concerns of students when they decide to study abroad, and it is difficult for many CUNY students to participate in study abroad programs without extra financial assistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even before the Great Recession of 2007 in the United States, the competitiveness of the job market, due to the globalization of the economy, has been attested by past literature, and the responses of colleges and universities to those global trends have been manifested in their master plans and curriculums. As more programs which aim to help students with their career pursuits, including study abroad programs, were developed on college campuses, there has been some research conducted to assess

college graduates' employability with a specific reference to their international experience.

Global Economy and College's Response

When considering the employment opportunities of college graduates, it is inevitable to first discuss globalization of the economy and the labor market. De Wit (2002) argues that "(T)he more international the labor market becomes as a result of the globalization of our economies, the more a graduate has to compete with people from other countries and the more he or she has to work in an international environment" (p. 90). This also implies that college graduates do not need to limit their employment opportunity within their own country, but will have access to job opportunities around the globe. However, the competition could be greater, and they must be able to demonstrate their readiness to work in an international environment.

Consequently, preparing graduates for the competitive global job market by equipping them with the necessary skills to be successful has become one of the most critical tasks of the colleges and universities, perhaps, more important than it has ever been. CUNY is no exception to this trend. CUNY's Master Plan (The City University of New York, n.d.) refers to the importance of providing opportunities for students "to develop specific strengths and skills" in order "to compete in today's global marketplace" and how expanding "experiential learning opportunities with private industry will position CUNY graduates to be more competitive in tomorrow's global workforce" (p.45).

Employers' Expectations

In 2013, the Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U) conducted a survey of business and nonprofit leaders, analyzing the employers'

priorities for the types of learning that college students need in order to succeed in today's economy (Hart Research Associates, 2013). Responding to the finding from this national survey, AAC&U launched the LEAP Employer-Educator Compact. More than 100 college presidents and 150 business and nonprofit leaders came together to pledge their commitment to high-quality learning which students "will need to navigate a fast-paced economy and to contribute to the future of (our) democracy" (p.2). In this Compact, educators and the businesses agreed to intensify the focus on "1) the learning college students most need both for the economy and for democracy; 2) 21st century designs for high-quality, hands-on learning that prepare students to deal with complexity, diversity, and change; and 3) the development of meaningful evidence about students' actual achievement in college" (p. 2). Additionally, the LEAP Compact identified what college students should attain in addition to what they learn in their majors:

- Broad learning about science, society, technology, human diversity, and global cultures and interdependence;
- Intellectual skills that support evidence-based reasoning and innovation – including analysis, communication, critical and creative thinking, quantitative fluency, information literacy, and collaborative problem solving;
- Personal and social responsibility, including ethical reasoning, civic and democratic knowledge and engagement, global acumen, and the capacity to work productively with diverse people and perspectives;
- Integrative and adaptive learning, including the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to complex problems and new settings.

(p.2)

“(G)lobal and community-based projects and experience” is listed as one of the “high-quality, hands-on learning” experiences which they committed to highlight (p. 3), and study abroad appears to offer a learning experience which enable students to achieve some of these goals.

The career benefit of international experience is not just anecdotal; it has been supported by past research. AAC&U has released several studies based on their survey on how employers believe colleges should prepare students for employment and the actual hiring practices since 2007, including the previously-mentioned study in 2013. These survey results illustrate interesting facts about employers’ perspectives on college graduates’ employability, which appear to be somewhat contradictory, yet still worth-highlighting in terms of how important employers consider their future employees’ intercultural experiences. For instance, in their 2013 survey, 96 percent of the employers said that they considered intercultural skills as fairly or very important when hiring (p. 6; Hart Research Associates, 2013). The survey in 2015, on the other hand, asked how “(e)mmployers value graduates’ completion of various applied and project-based learning experiences” in college , and only 51 percent said that a company would much more likely or somewhat more likely consider hiring a recent college graduate with study abroad experience (p. 7; Hart Research Associate, 2015). This number is much lower than some other types of learning experiences such as an internship, which scored the highest at 94 percent, or a senior thesis, which scored 87 percent. However, one can also argue that at least half of the employers believe that they are more likely to hire graduates with study abroad experience, and it could be significant enough to make a difference, especially for newly graduated students who have very little or no prior work experience.

Study Abroad Alumni's Perceptions on Job Search

While AAC&U's research focuses more on employers' perspectives on students' international experience and employment, there has also been research that assessed students' perspectives. Franklin (2008) examined a case of Dickinson College's study abroad alumni from the class of 1998 on their perceptions on if and how skills, knowledge, and self-awareness that they acquired through their study abroad experiences influenced their career paths and their competitiveness as a job applicant 10 years after graduation. Some of the findings of her research include that Dickinson study abroad alumni see that "study abroad has significant long-term career impact and professional applicability" and they "are getting positive returns on the time, energy, and money once invested in their international education." They believe that "study abroad has proven to be an attractive achievement that increases the competitiveness of their employee profile."

What is unique about Franklin's research is that she focused on the long-term effect of study abroad by interviewing study abroad alumni who graduated 10 years earlier as opposed to the experience of the recent graduates. Also, her research was a case study conducted at Dickinson College, a private liberal arts college with approximately 2,300 students and where more than 50 percent of the students participate in study abroad programs (Dickinson College, n.d.). It has a very different institutional culture and profile from a large public university system like CUNY, with 269,000 degree-seeking students, in terms of funding sources, academic offerings, size of the institution, students' ethnic and socio-economic background, etc. All of these contextual differences can result in different types of student engagement and experience.

Potts (2015) has also conducted similar research regarding the relationship between the study abroad experience and early career benefits with recent graduates in Australia. In 2002, the former Australian Government Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Regulations defined the framework of employable skills of graduates based on the analysis of industry requirements as the following: communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organizing skills, self-management skills, life-long learning skills, and technology skills. Potts' study argues that "learning abroad contributes to the development of at least four areas included in the employability skills framework (i.e. communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, and self-management skills, conceptualized in this study as similar to maturity and personal development)" (p. 453). Her finding verifies that study abroad experiences can potentially help students develop skills that are sought out by the industry in their early career and in an Australian context.

ACC&U's 2015 survey was also conducted with college students to compare the results with those from employers. Some of the key findings of this research show that employers feel that students need not only the field-specific knowledge, but also "a broad range of skills and knowledge that apply to a variety of field" (p. 2; Hart Research Associates, 2015). It also revealed that students believe they are more prepared for the employment than employers do. With regards to the study abroad experience specifically, this report shows that 71 percent of the college students thought that companies were more likely to hire graduates who had studied abroad; whereas, as mentioned previously, only 51 percent of the employers thought that they were more likely to hire graduates with study abroad experience (p. 9). It is important to recognize, however, that this survey was conducted with students who were still attending college

at the time of the survey and who may or may not have studied abroad. It only describes the impression of the future graduates who had not yet experienced the job search, and it does not portray the reality of actual job search experience by the recent graduates, which this research will assess.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This capstone research follows the tradition of case study. Case study is “an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61; Creswell, 1998). The research aims to investigate the case of recent graduates of CUNY undergraduate programs who participated in credit-bearing study abroad programs sponsored by CSI between the fall term 2010 and the summer term 2015. It describes the perspectives of those recent CUNY graduates regarding their job search experience after graduation in relation to their participation in study abroad programs.

Data was collected through an online survey and follow-up individual interviews with selected respondents. The initial online survey included both closed- and open-ended questions to gather information about students’ biographic and education backgrounds, types of study abroad programs that they participated in, and general trends in their job search experiences. It was distributed to 1,177 study abroad alumni, and 83 alumni submitted a complete survey at seven percent response rate. Specific reasons for the low response rate are unknown, but some of the anticipated reasons could be outdated or unused e-mail addresses, the short response time allowed, which was about 13 days, and lack of interest. Some people may still be attending

college and were ineligible to participate in the survey. Out of 26 survey respondents who agreed to be contacted for a follow-up interview, 23 of them were contacted for a follow-up interview; three were excluded because they had not yet graduated. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted via phone or Skype with the four who were available when needed.

One of the limitations of this research design was that the researcher has known some of the program alumni more than others as she worked directly with those who participated in the programs that she coordinated. Naturally, there were more survey responses from those whom the researcher has worked with than those she has not, and the majority of the interviewees were students whom the researcher has assisted in going abroad. This might have distorted the types of data collected from the online survey and interviews.

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the recent CUNY study abroad alumni' perceptions of the relationship between their study abroad experience and their job search experience in a qualitative manner. It is not intended to present any kind of comparative data of the actual employment rate of those who studied abroad and those who did not study abroad, nor those of recent graduates and those who had graduated a long time ago. The findings of this research also do not include the perceptions of the employers toward the employability of the study abroad alumni, even though their perspectives could matter more than the study abroad alumni's when it comes to the actual employment practices. Similarly, it does not reflect the perceptions of any other stakeholders such as program providers, parents, university administrators, or the policy makers, but purely focused on the perspectives of the study abroad alumni themselves.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Participants and Program Profile

Of the 83 surveys received, 11 were excluded because the respondent had not yet graduated from college, and 72 were analyzed. Forty-nine survey participants (68 percent) were female, and 23 participants (32 percent) were male. This is very similar to the gender ratio of all CUNY students who participated in CSI-sponsored study abroad programs between Fall 2010 and Summer 2015, which is 65-percent female to 35-percent male. Survey participants' exposure to international experience prior to study abroad varied, but almost half (47 percent) of the survey participants had gone on some type of international travel prior to studying abroad; the study abroad program, though, was their first time traveling independently from their family or school (Table 1).

Table 1: International Experience Prior to Study Abroad

"I am or my family is from overseas and had lived or stayed outside of the U.S. for an extended period of time."	7 (10%)
"I had never traveled outside of the U.S. prior to the study abroad program."	15 (21%)
"I had traveled overseas independently for extended period of time prior to the study abroad program."	16 (22%)
"I had traveled overseas prior to the study abroad program, but it was a vacation with my family and / or a school trip in high school which was less than two weeks."	34 (47%)

There was one survey participant who graduated with an associate degree, 61 with a bachelor's degree, eight with a master's degree, and one with no response. Twenty-one participants graduated with a major in a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) field, which was the largest group, followed by 16 participants in psychology, 12 participants in business and economics, and 11 participants in English (Table 2). Even though there were only two participants who majored in World Languages and Literature, it was the most popular minor with 11 participants. Twenty-

five graduated with double majors and one with a triple major. Thirty-one graduated with one or two minors.

Table 2: Participants' Major/Minor

	Major	Minor
Anthropology	1	1
Area Studies/Geography	0	2
Art/Performing Arts	5	3
Business/Economics	12	0
Children & Youth Studies/Education	7	0
English	11	6
History	1	5
International Studies	3	0
Linguistics	2	0
Political Science/Public Affairs	9	2
Psychology	16	1
Science & Engineering	21	7
Sociology	2	1
World Languages & Literature (Chinese, French, Japanese, and Spanish)	2	11
Others (Forensic Science; Human Service; Legal Studies; Liberal Arts; Philosophy; Nursing)	5	1

Eighty-six percent of these study abroad alumni indicated that they participated in other types of co-curricular or extra-curricular activities than study abroad before they graduated from college. These activities include athletics, Greek life, internships based in the United States, campus leadership opportunities such as student government, student clubs, and undergraduate research.

So far as the types of programs that survey respondents participated in, 78 percent went on a program shorter than eight weeks (Table 3). This is slightly higher than the national figure, which is 62 percent (Institute of International Education, 2015). Twenty-one percent participated in semester-long programs, and three percent in academic year programs. Twenty-four participants (33 percent) went on study abroad programs twice or more before they graduated. Twenty-seven participants went to Italy, which was the largest group, followed by 14 students to Japan, 11 students to China, and seven students to Denmark (Table 4). Eighty-seven percent of the programs that

they participated in were host-university-based programs in which classes were taught by faculty members from the host institutions, and 13 percent went on programs led and taught by CUNY faculty members. The primary language of instruction on most of the programs was English, except that the language courses were often taught in the target language. Ten students reported that they participated in internships abroad for academic credit, even though the researcher is not sure about the credibility of their responses because, as the former coordinator of those programs, the researcher knows that some of the programs that they participated in did not offer credit-bearing internships.

Table 3: Program Duration

Less than two weeks	2 (2%)
2-4 weeks	49 (54%)
5-8 weeks	20 (22%)
Semester	19 (21%)
Academic Year	3 (3%)

Table 4: Study Abroad Destinations

Australia	4	Ireland	1
Belgium	1	Italy	27
China	11	Japan	14
Costa Rica	1	Middle East (country unknown)	1
Denmark	7	Morocco	1
Dominican Republic	1	Netherland	1
Ecuador	4	Poland	1
England	3	South Korea	1
Greece	3	Spain	2
Hong Kong	2	U.S. Virgin Islands	3
Indonesia	1		

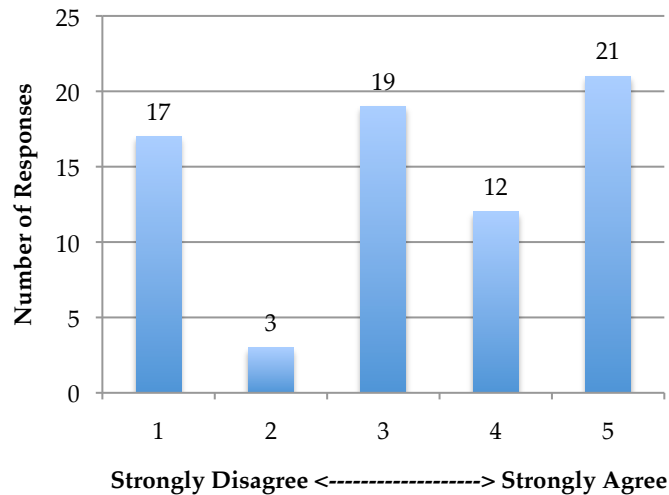
Interviewees were good representations of CUNY students, even though there were only four interviews, and included two students with international family backgrounds and one non-traditional college aged student. The program destination and length are also diverse. The profiles of each interviewee are as follows:

- Female; double major in International Studies and Political Science with Spanish minor; participated in a semester-long exchange program in Japan; participated in a sorority and honors program during college; currently works at a healthcare non-profit organization; spent 0-3 months on job search.
- Female; Education major; participated in a five-week program in England and a four-week program in Italy; participated in a student club during college; currently works as a Peace Corp Volunteer after working as a substitute teacher in the United States for a year; spent 0-3 months on job search.
- Female; originally from Guyana and moved to the United States at the age of 14; International Studies major; participated in a four-week program in Ecuador; internship at an after-school program, which worked with high school students to build a school overseas during college; currently works at an international education organization; spent 0-3 months on job search.
- Male; Originally from Dominican Republic; Japanese major; non-traditional college age; CUNY was his second bachelor's degree; had previously worked before attending CUNY; participated in an academic-year program in Japan; currently works at an international fashion retail company; spent 0-3 months on job search.

The Impact of Study Abroad on the Job Search

Out of 72 survey respondents, 32 (46 percent) said that study abroad experience influenced their career choices (Chart 1). This result shows that CUNY study abroad alumni recognize the impact of study abroad on their career choices as much as some of the past research conducted at different institutions has shown (Franklin, 2008; Ostania, 2005).

Chart 1: "My study abroad experience influenced my career choice."



The degree of the impact varies depending on the individual from reaffirming the academic or professional career that they had already planned prior to studying abroad, to changing the major or career direction completely. In the surveys, CUNY study abroad alumni described the impact as follows:

- “I think mostly what I gained was learning about what I really want to do with my career and life, even though my current job and life situation is not that.”
- “I loved my experience studying abroad; even though I already knew the career and life choices I was going to make prior to this experience. However, this experience cemented my central idea and I am currently living in Italy, ...working on my proficiency of the Italian language and of course applying for post-graduate studies in order to be able to be an educator in the field of learning English as a second language.”

One of the interviewees who works in an international education organization also commented:

Participation in study abroad gave me the confidence I needed in order to pursue a career within the international education realm.

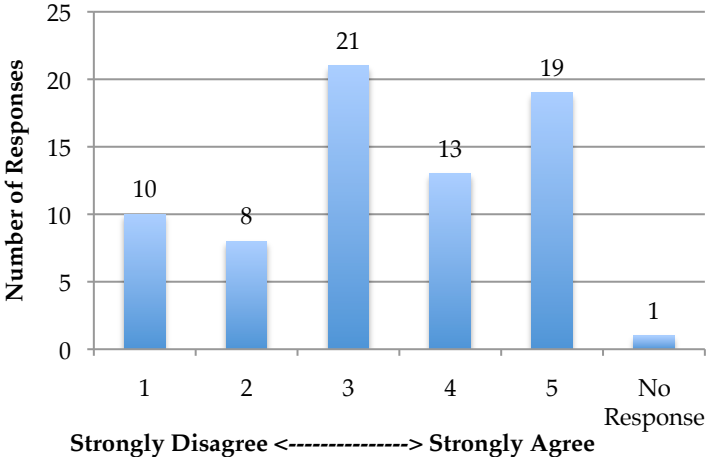
On the other hand, for the interviewee who is currently a Peace Corp Volunteer, study abroad was a career-changing event. She said:

(Study Abroad) was eye-opening and led me to change my major. Studying abroad helped me decide to join the Peace Corps because it made me want to live internationally.

Survey participants were also asked to indicate how long it took them secure their first professional job after graduation. While 39 graduates (54 percent) have successfully found a job after graduating from college and 22 graduates (31 percent) decided to pursue an advanced degree, seven graduates (10 percent) spent three months or longer on the job search and are still unemployed. The other five percent include those who graduated in the past three months and were looking for a job, those who were doing an internship or a part-time job, and one participant with no response.

These numbers do not necessarily indicate that the CUNY study abroad alumni were particularly successful in landing a job after graduation, considering an 8.5-percent unemployment rate of young college graduates according to the EPI report (Shierholz, Davis, and Kimball, 2014). However, what is interesting here is that 32 CUNY graduates (44 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that their study abroad experience helped/can help them in getting their first professional job, which is considerably more than 18 graduates (25 percent) who did not agree or strongly disagreed (Chart 2). Even though study abroad may not have significantly helped the CUNY study abroad alumni to be more marketable as job candidates in actuality, CUNY students themselves felt that study abroad helped/can help their job search process.

Chart 2: "My study abroad experience helped/can help me to get my first professional job."

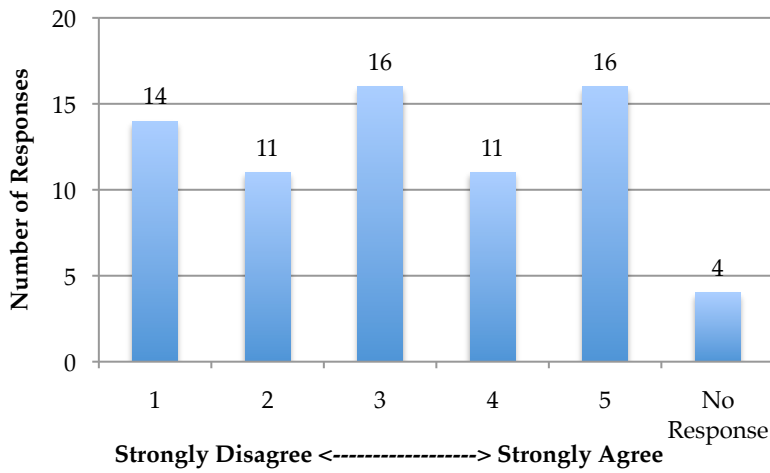


It is also worth noting that that this perception is shared not only within those who work in a particular industry. As shown in Table 5, CUNY study abroad alumni work in various industries. CUNY study abroad alumni who work in almost all industries represented, except for law enforcement and marketing, rated three or higher when they were asked if they believe that their study abroad experience helped or can help them get their first professional jobs, with five being strongly agree. At the same time, only half of those who landed a job said that their jobs involve an international or multicultural dimension (Chart 3). In other words, many CUNY study abroad alumni feel that study abroad has helped them in getting a job regardless of the field they work in and whether the job itself has any international or intercultural aspects or not.

Table 5: Post-graduation Job Field

Job Field	Number of Respondents	"My study abroad experience helped/ can help me to get my first professional job." (1=Strongly disagree/5=Strongly agree)
Accounting	1	5
Aerospace	1	5
Economic Development	1	5
Education	9	3.4
Fashion	2	3.5
Finance	4	3.8
Forensic Psychology	1	4
Health	4	4
Hospitality/ Customer Service	3	3.3
IT	1	4
Law	1	3
Law Enforcement	1	1
Local Government	1	4
Marketing	1	2
Media	1	5
Non-profit	3	3.3
Research	1	4
Social Work	1	4

Chart 3: "My first professional job after graduation involve(d) international/multicultural dimension."



Areas which Contributed to the Job Search

According to the online survey, as indicated in Table 6, the skills, knowledge, and attributes which CUNY study abroad alumni gained through the study abroad experience and helped them to become more marketable job candidates are: global point of view (57 percent); communication skills (44 percent), ability to work with others (50 percent), problem-solving skills (44 percent), adaptability (60 percent), maturity (61 percent), flexibility (49 percent), independence (57 percent), open-mindedness (57 percent), motivation (54 percent), and self-awareness (58 percent).

Table 6: "How did the following skills/attributes which students could gain from study abroad experience contribute to your first job search?"

	Did not contribute at all		Contributed a little		Contributed sufficiently		Contributed greatly		Not applicable		No response	
Foreign language proficiency	17	24%	13	18%	12	17%	16	22%	13	18%	1	1%
Global point of view	5	7%	11	15%	11	15%	41	57%	3	4%	1	1%
Knowledge about / experience with the host country	17	24%	7	10%	7	10%	27	38%	13	18%	1	1%
Academic knowledge relevant to the occupation	15	21%	14	19%	15	21%	13	18%	13	18%	2	3%
Professional skills relevant to the occupation	13	18%	11	15%	22	31%	16	22%	9	13%	1	1%
Communication skills	7	10%	9	13%	17	24%	32	44%	6	8%	1	1%
Ability to work with others	9	13%	6	8%	16	22%	36	50%	4	6%	1	1%
Problem-solving skills	8	11%	14	19%	13	18%	32	44%	4	6%	1	1%
Adaptability	5	7%	7	10%	10	14%	43	60%	6	8%	1	1%
Maturity	3	4%	6	8%	14	19%	44	61%	4	6%	1	1%
Flexibility	5	7%	8	11%	20	28%	35	49%	3	4%	1	1%
Independence	2	3%	8	11%	15	21%	41	57%	5	7%	1	1%
Open-mindedness	3	4%	8	11%	15	21%	41	57%	4	6%	1	1%
Motivation	5	7%	6	8%	16	22%	39	54%	5	7%	1	1%
Self-awareness	5	7%	8	11%	13	18%	42	58%	3	4%	1	1%
Crisis management skills	10	14%	10	14%	16	22%	27	38%	7	10%	2	3%

Table 7 shows that the survey participants said the following three elements of the study abroad program contributed sufficiently or contributed greatly to their competitiveness as a job seeker, which seems to have helped students to develop above-

mentioned attributes: traveling (61 percent), interacting with people from around the world (55 percent), and living independently from family / friends in the United States (54 percent).

Table 7: “How did the following elements of your program contribute to your competitiveness as a job candidate after graduation?”

	Did not contribute at all		Contributed a little		Contributed sufficiently		Contributed greatly		Not applicable		No response	
Classes	16	22%	16	22%	17	24%	13	18%	8	11%	2	3%
Traveling	9	13%	11	15%	23	32%	21	29%	5	7%	3	4%
Interacting with people from the host country	12	17%	17	24%	17	24%	17	24%	7	10%	2	3%
Interacting with people from around the world	9	13%	15	21%	17	24%	22	31%	7	10%	2	3%
Living independently from family / friends in the U.S.	13	18%	9	13%	13	18%	26	36%	9	13%	2	3%
Homestay	15	21%	5	7%	8	11%	5	7%	35	49%	4	6%
Internship abroad	13	18%	4	6%	4	6%	12	17%	36	50%	3	4%
Community service / volunteer activities abroad	14	19%	3	4%	11	15%	11	15%	30	42%	3	4%

Some of the comments from the survey participants explained how these skills and attributes helped them become more ideal job candidates:

- “My time abroad was more than I ever expected. I made many friends from around the world; left an impact in the host city; and have returned with a new view of the world and a better understanding of the Japanese people.”
- “Personally, study abroad was a form of growth for me. I lived at home during college, so it was my step towards independence and individuality. I didn't use my experiences like an ace in my pocket, but it did influence how I looked at the world. I feel that perspective carried through in my conversations in interviews as well.”
- “Study abroad is always helpful because it opens your mind and perspective to new ideas and cultures.”

- “My time in Italy made me a better citizen of the world, making it possible for me to adapt to a new culture. During my semester I learned a lot of Italian, made invaluable friendships and gained the independence I needed. When I moved to South Korea I was ready for the challenge ahead of me because my experience in Italy made the transition easier. I grew as a woman, as a traveler and became a better employee because of it.”
- “(M)y faculty-led study abroad experience did not affect my job search much. The reason for the lack of correlation is purely due to the fact that my trip (tropical ecology) was related to my major, which was biology, and my post-graduation school and job is pharmacy. I can, however, make the claim that my trip helped me be more independent, which is something I needed to be at my job.”
- “Studying abroad has been the greatest decision I've made so far in my life. ...it sure has helped me grow and open my curiosity to continue to travel, which has opened me to work hard to reach my goal. ... Being abroad has challenge me and has opened up my eyes to other parts of the world, as well as helped with my fear of being alone.”
- “It made me more aware of things around me and outside of the United States such as politics, people, and media.”

A comment from an interviewee who spent a semester in Japan also referred to the communication skills and ability to work with others, which she developed during the study abroad program:

I think for my current position, something that helped me to get the job and help me to do well at my job is my ability to read social situations. Having moved overseas while I was studying abroad and ...making friends with people from

different cultures, I am able to have conversations with people and be more empathetic based on cultural or social differences. I am able to read those situations and be personable and build stronger relationships and more solid foundations for those relationships based on the people skills that I learned from communicating with people from different cultures.

Many CUNY graduates also noted that they felt that study abroad was a great item to add to their resume. It was something that they could talk about during a job interview to leave an impression on the interviewers, and it helped them to be more competitive job candidates regardless of the actual skills and attributes gained through the study abroad experience:

- “It has been an amazing and impressive addition to my resume. It's an ideal conversation starter during interviews. It has helped to set me apart from other candidates as I begin a new job search.”
- “During the interview, I was able to bring up the study abroad experience as more of a casual topic to show that I am well-rounded. I found some interviewers were really able to connect to the study abroad experience themselves.”

All four interviewees said that they highlighted the study abroad experience while they were applying for jobs in one way or another, and that they were asked some questions about their study abroad experience in many interviews that they had. An interviewee who worked as a substitute teacher before joining Peace Corp explained how having study abroad on her resume made her look different from other job candidates:

It (study abroad) was something that could set me apart from everybody else. It's something that somebody would remember besides “hey I am a hard worker” or “I'm a people person.”... Especially as teachers, I don't think a lot of people take

the opportunity to do (study abroad) because I think people think it's hard to find a class that will align with their degree. So, it's something that just was like "oh, you did that, what was it like?"

Areas which did not Contribute to the Job Search

There were three skills and knowledge areas CUNY study abroad alumni did not think contributed greatly to their competitiveness as job candidates compared to other skills. They were foreign language proficiency, academic knowledge relevant to the occupation, and professional skills relevant to the occupation, and only 22 percent, 18 percent, and 22 percent of the survey respondents respectively thought they contributed greatly to their employability. Some graduates actually indicated that they use the foreign language skill to communicate with their clients or patients at work; however, many study abroad alumni did not score the foreign language skill as highly as some other skills.

DISCUSSION

Conclusions

This research questioned whether the study abroad experience helped CUNY students with their post-graduation job search and, if it did, in what way. The results revealed that even though the level of impact that study abroad made to students' career decisions varies, as some of them already knew what they wanted to do prior to study abroad and others made changes to their academic and career plan after study abroad, 44 percent, of the CUNY study abroad alumni who participated in this research felt that their study abroad experience helped or could be helpful to land their first professional job after graduation. CUNY study abroad alumni perceived that study

abroad helped them to get a job regardless of the industry in which they work and whether or not their job involves an international or intercultural dimension. Many CUNY study abroad alumni also highlighted their study abroad experience during their job search. It gave them a talking point during the job interviews as a unique item which sets them apart from other job candidates. These study abroad alumni feel that they were able to raise their profile as competitive job candidates because of their study abroad experience, and they saw the career benefit.

The attributes which CUNY study abroad alumni gained through study abroad and which they believed helped them to become more marketable job candidates are more concentrated in soft skills rather than foreign language skills and specific academic or professional knowledge. These soft skills include communication skills, ability to work with others, problem-solving skills, adaptability, maturity, flexibility, independence, open-mindedness, motivation, and self-awareness.

On the other hand, the research participants did not find that foreign language skills and specific academic or professional knowledge that they gained during study abroad program helped their job search. The reason that the language skills did not help much could be due to the fact many study abroad participants did not have to study the language and that not every job requires foreign language proficiency. The data collected from the survey and interviews were not sufficient to specify the reason why academic knowledge and professional skills relevant to the occupation scored low. However, one of the interviewee's comments seems to imply a potential reason. She said, in providing advice to the prospective study abroad students, that students should pick a country and classes that they will love even if the classes did not meet the degree requirements because having the experience of living in the country that they come to

love and doing something they like make the experience more meaningful and genuine, and it can eventually make a more positive impact on their career choices and lives.

According to a 2012 survey from the British Council on students in the United Kingdom and the United States, students from the United States “expressed concern about pursuing academic opportunities in other countries owing to the high standard of domestic provisions, which they also felt was something recognised by future employers, instead, they pursued study abroad to develop soft skills and add non-academic weight to their resumes” (p. 50; British Council, 2013). This is also supported by the result of the AAC&U’s 2013 study which confirmed that employers value “capacities that cut across majors” such as critical thinking skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills more than student’s choice of major (p. 1; Harts Research Associates, 2013). The interviewee who studied abroad in Japan and works in a healthcare non-profit organization explained the value of the transferrable communication skill:

I think more of the soft skills that helped (as opposed to concrete skills and knowledge about Japan that I gained through study abroad experience) because the job that I have now is not very internationally focused though I do deal with people from different cultures. I primarily deal with people of Latin American descent so I have a different experience that helped me with that, but I would say that my study abroad experience (in Japan) reinforced that.

If this is the case, CUNY study abroad alumni might not necessarily be expecting to gain specific academic knowledge or professional skills through study abroad experience to start with. In other words, CUNY students might have intended to satisfy their academic and professional needs, which they might consider are provided at higher-level in the United States than overseas anyway, at their home colleges. Instead,

they went on study abroad programs to develop the types of skills which are unique to the study abroad experience including acquiring “soft skills” such as communication skills, adaptability, maturity, and other skills and knowledge which survey respondents rated highly. Whether this is the outcome that the program provider wanted to see or not, the programs may be providing what students hoped to gain from the program.

Practical Applicability

The findings from this research are helpful to CSI, the program provider, and to CUNY as a whole, and they confirmed that their programs are making meaningful differences on students’ job search experience. This type of outcome assessment is very important for the program provider because it tells what students are gaining through the program. It also gives them an opportunity to make sure that their programs are producing the intended outcome for them and to make adjustments and improvements for the better results.

To maximize the career development benefits of an international experience, program providers can design their programs intentionally with a focus on further strengthening those areas which help students to be more employable graduates. Study abroad is already considered as one of the “high-impact” educational practices expected to increase student engagement according to Kuh (2008). This aligns with the “21st century designs for high-quality, hands-on learning that prepare students to deal with complexity, diversity, and change” which the LEAP Employer-Educator Compact suggests (p. 2; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014). While the academic nature of the program could and should be maintained as long as it is credit-bearing even if the employers do not care so much about what students study in their majors, programs can be deliberately designed in a way which creates an opportunity

for the “high-impact” and “high-quality, hands-on” learning experience for the students, not only to enhance their attainment of the academic contents, but also to encourage students’ development of the kind of skills that are sought by the industry.

This research also contributed to studies that have already been done regarding the career benefit of study abroad. Together with similar research in the past, findings from this research help to better understand the impact of international experience on college graduates’ job search processes, providing more insight, particularly about the perceptions of recent graduates in a public urban university context. Given the inquiry result, study abroad professionals and career advisors can promote study abroad as one tool that may help with career development. Even if the program did not seem to be directly related with the profession that students want to pursue, there could be some skills and attributes which students can gain from study abroad experience and which could help in increasing their employability. Especially for students who, like many CUNY students, have financial challenges, it is important to be able to project the benefit of the investment of their time and money when they decide to go on a study abroad program. The participants of this research testified that study abroad helped them to be a more employable person and was a great item to add to their resume. Nothing can be as convincing as testimonials from past program participants when prospective students are trying to decide whether to go on a study abroad program or not.

The result of this research also offers some hints on how students can use their international experience more effectively during their job search. Firstly, it helps students to identify some key areas of skills and attributes which they developed during study abroad. Students can match those with what the employers are looking for in their future employees and highlight them on their resumes and in their interviews

to make them look more attractive job candidates. Also, knowing that study abroad can be a very captivating topic during the job interviews, career advisors can train students on how to integrate it into their job interviews more effectively.

Recommendation for Future Research

This research leaves room for additional study on the impact of the study abroad experience on students' job search process and employability. One of the areas of potential future study is comparative research on the employability of students who studied abroad and those who did not. Further inquiry can be made to clarify how other co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, which students participated in during college, impacted students' employability compared to study abroad. Because this research did not differentiate between study abroad and other activities and programs which students were involved in college and depended solely on study abroad alumni's perception and interpretation, it may not have presented the most accurate effect of study abroad. This can be developed into a more elaborate outcome assessment of CUNY's co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to measure how successful each activity is in terms of materializing what CUNY suggests in the Master Plan (The City University of New York, n.d.), which is to provide opportunities for students to acquire strengths and skills to be competitive in today's global market.

Also, all four study abroad alumni who were interviewed for this research agreed either that the study abroad experience influenced their career choice and/or that it helped them to get their first professional jobs, and they had positive perspectives on the issue. More intentional selection of the interviewees could have contributed to a different take on the same issue. More specifically, further examination of the experience of those who did not agree that study abroad helped their job search

or those who are struggling to get a job may help in identifying where the difference in students' experiences come from, and the result could possibly be used for improving advisement, program design, and post-program support.

A longitudinal study with the same or a similar group of study abroad alumni to assess their perceptions on the impact of study abroad on long-term career development is also recommended. Such a study is anticipated to produce some interesting comparative study results on how their perceptions did or did not change over time. Additionally, because there has been other research on the long-term effect of study abroad on career development at various institutions with different types of students as previously mentioned in the literature review, similarities and differences among those studies could also be analyzed.

Lastly, as the job market continues to be difficult, more than just a college diploma is expected from college graduates in the United States to be able to compete with those who already have work experience and global talents from overseas. The study abroad outcome could be measured in many different ways, but assessing career impact is very important as it seems to be the interest of many stakeholders, including students, parents, schools, and businesses. This research confirmed that many recent CUNY study abroad alumni connect their international experience positively to their job search. With additional improvements to the programs, more students can benefit from what study abroad has to offer.

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APPENDIX A: E-mail Invitation to Online Survey

From: Satoko Fukai
Subject: Survey: The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

Dear CSI Study Abroad Program Alum,

My name is Satoko Fukai, and I am a Study Abroad Advisor in the Center for International Service at College of Staten Island. Some of you might remember me as I assisted the program(s) that you attended.

I am currently conducting a research project on the impact of the study abroad experience on the post-graduation job search for my master's degree in International Education from the SIT Graduate Institute. You have been chosen to participate in this survey because you have studied abroad with the College of Staten Island between Fall 2010 and Summer 2015.

This survey online survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete. To begin, visit the online survey site. Please submit your complete survey by Wednesday, February 23, 2016.

Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated. For questions, feel free to contact Satoko Fukai at satoko.fukai@mail.sit.edu .

Sincerely,

Satoko Fukai
Study Abroad Advisor, College of Staten Island / The City University of New York
Graduate Student, SIT Graduate Institute

APPENDIX B: Online Survey Consent Form and Questions

The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

* Required

Have you graduated from college? *

- Yes - Please proceed to the following page.
- No. - Thank you for your willingness to participate, but this survey is only for students who graduated. If you would like to leave any comments about the impact of study abroad on your job search process, please click "Continue" at the bottom of the page.

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The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

General Information

Please tell us about yourself.

Age

Genger

- Female
- Male
- I prefer not to disclose my gender.
- Other:

When did you graduate?

What is the highest degree you have earned?

What was your undergraduate major?

Major 1

What was your undergraduate major?

Major 2

What was your undergraduate major?

Major 3

What was your undergraduate minor?

Minor 1

What was your undergraduate minor?

Minor 2

Please describe your international experience prior to study abroad.

- I had never traveled outside of the U.S. prior to the study abroad program.
- I had traveled overseas prior to the study abroad program, but it was a vacation with my family and/or a school trip in high school which was less than 2 weeks.
- I had traveled overseas independently for extended period of time prior to the study abroad program.
- I am or my family is from overseas and had lived or stayed outside of the U.S. for an extended period of time.
- Other:

Which activities did you participate in before you graduate?

- Athletics
- Fraternity/Sorority
- Internship based in the U.S.
- Campus leadership opportunities such as Student Government
- Student clubs
- Undergraduate research
- Other:

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The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

Program Information

Please tell us about the study abroad program(s) which you participated in.

Program #1

[PROGRAM #1] Host Country/Region

[Program #1] How long was your study abroad program?

- Less than 2 weeks
- 2-4 weeks
- 5-8 weeks
- 9-12 weeks
- Semester
- Academic Year

[Program #1] Program Type

- Study Abroad or Exchange Program (Host-university-based program in which classes are taught by the faculty members from the host institution)
- Faculty-led Program (Program led by a CUNY faculty member)
- Other:

[Program #1] Language of Instruction

- Arabic
- Chinese
- English
- French
- German
- Japanese
- Spanish
- Other:

[Program #1] Did you do an internship abroad? Was it for academic credits or not-for-credit.

- Yes, and it was for academic credits.
- Yes, but it was not-for-credit.
- No.

Program #2

[PROGRAM #2] Host Country/Region

[Program #2] How long was your study abroad program?

- Less than 2 weeks
- 2-4 weeks
- 5-8 weeks
- 9-12 weeks
- Semester
- Academic Year

[Program #2] Program Type

- Study Abroad or Exchange Program (Host-university-based program in which classes are taught by the faculty members from the host institution)
- Faculty-led Program (Program led by a CUNY faculty member)
- Other:

[Program #2] Language of Instruction

- Arabic
- Chinese
- English
- French
- German
- Japanese
- Spanish
- Other:

[Program #2] Did you do an internship abroad? Was it for academic credits or not-for-credit.

- Yes, and it was for academic credits.
- Yes, but it was not-for-credit.
- No.

Program #3

[PROGRAM #3] Host Country/Region

[Program #3] How long was your study abroad program?

- Less than 2 weeks
- 2-4 weeks
- 5-8 weeks
- 9-12 weeks
- Semester
- Academic Year

[Program #3] Program Type

- Study Abroad or Exchange Program (Host-university-based program in which classes are taught by the faculty members from the host institution)
- Faculty-led Program (Program led by a CUNY faculty member)
- Other:

[Program #3] Language of Instruction

- Arabic
- Chinese
- English
- French
- German
- Japanese
- Spanish
- Other:

[Program #3] Did you do an internship abroad? Was it for academic credits or not-for-credit.

- Yes, and it was for academic credits.
- Yes, but it was not-for-credit.
- No.

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The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

Job Search and Professional Experience Part I

Please answer the following questions regarding your job search and professional experience.

What have you done your graduation from college?

- I searched for a job, got a job offer, and have worked.
- I have searched for a job, but have never worked.
- I have decided to pursue an advanced degree.
- Other:

What career field or industry was your first professional job after graduation in?

If you are looking for a job, please indicate in which career field or industry you are interested in working.

What was/is your job title of your first professional job after graduation?

If you have never worked, please skip this question.

How long did it take you to get your first professional job after your graduation?

If you are still looking for a job, please indicate how long you have been doing the job search.

- 0-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-12 months
- More than 12 months

How long did you stay in your first professional job after graduation?

If you have never worked, please skip this question.

- 0-6 months
- 6-12 months
- 13-24 months
- More than 24 years

The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

Job Search and Professional Experience Part II

Please indicate how strongly agree/disagree with the following statements about your first professional job and/or your job search.

"My study abroad experience influenced my career choice."

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

"My first professional job after graduation involve(d) international/multicultural dimension."

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

If your first professional job after graduation involve(d) international/multicultural dimension, please explain how so.

"My study abroad experience helped/can help me to get my first professional job."

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

How did the following skills/attributes which students could gain from study abroad experience contribute to your first job search?

Did not
contribute at
all

Contributed
little

Contributed
sufficiently

Contributed
greatly

Not applicable

Foreign language proficiency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Global point of view	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledge about/experience with the host country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic knowledge relevant to the occupation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional skills relevant to the occupation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to work with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Problem-solving skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adaptability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maturity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Open-mindedness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Motivation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crisis management skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are other skills/attributes which you gained from study abroad experience which contributed to your first job search if there are any?

How did the following elements of your program contribute to your competitiveness as a job candidate after graduation?

Did not contribute at all	Contributed little	Contributed sufficiently	Contributed greatly	Not applicable
---------------------------	--------------------	--------------------------	---------------------	----------------

Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traveling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interacting with people from the host country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interacting with people from around the world	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Living independently from family/friends in the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homestay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internship abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community service/volunteer activities abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are other elements of your program which contributed to your competitiveness as a job candidate after graduation if there are any?

Text

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The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

Any comments?

Feel free to write any comments regarding the impact of your study abroad experience on your job search and professional career.

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The Impact of Study Abroad on Post-graduation Job Search

Survey Result and Follow-up Interview

Would you like a summary of the responses sent to you?

- Yes - Please provide your e-mail address below.
 No

E-mail address

Are you interested in participating in a follow-up in-person or skype interview (approx. 20-30 min)?

- Yes - Please provide your contact information below.
 No, please do not contact me for further interview.

Last Name

First Name

Phone Number

E-mail Address

Skype ID (if available)

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APPENDIX C: Interview Questions

This was a semi-structured interview. Additional questions were asked depending on the individual survey responses.

- 1) How did you highlight your study abroad experience when you are applying for a job if you did? If you didn't highlight your study abroad experience in your job search, why not?
- 2) How study abroad experience did or did not impact your career path decision?
- 3) Please tell me if and what specific skills you gained from study abroad experience helped you to be more competitive job candidate and how.
- 4) Please tell me if and what specific knowledge you gained from study abroad experience helped you to be more competitive job candidate and how.
- 5) Please tell me if and what specific attitude you gained from study abroad experience helped you to be more competitive job candidate and how.
- 6) Please tell me what other experience during college helped you to be a competitive job candidate if any.
- 7) What kind of advice do you have to college students who are considering studying abroad in terms of a tool for career development?