Professionalisation

A resource for studying abroad

Australian Learning & Teaching Council

Produced by Greg Downey, Tonia Gray & Jan Gothard

2012
The Bringing the Learning Home Team:

Jan Gothard (Murdoch, Project Leader)
Greg Downey (Macquarie)
Tonia Gray (University of Western Sydney)
Linda Butcher (Murdoch, Project Manager)

Design by Greg Downey

The BTLH Students were exchange students from Macquarie University, Murdoch University, and the University of Wollongong.

Support for the production of this publication has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, and where otherwise noted, all material presented in this document is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/).

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the CC BY 3.0 AU licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode).

Requests and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to:

Office for Learning and Teaching
Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
GPO Box 9880, Location code N255EL10
Sydney NSW 2001
learningandteaching@deewr.gov.au

2012
ISBN [Office of Learning and Teaching WILL ADD]
Program goals

- Orient students to potential professional and skills-based outcomes of study abroad prior to their departure so that they are more likely to achieve concrete gains in these areas from their experience.

- Assist students to leverage their study abroad experience into career opportunities, postgraduate education, and into greater expertise.

- Make students more aware of what they have learned and how to talk about these gains in terms that will make sense to other people, both in interviews and in job letters and other documents.

- Crystalise better and more explicitly for students the benefits of study abroad and exchange.

Rationale

The goal of the Professionalisation module is to encourage students to see the relevance of their overseas experience in educational exchange for their future goals, including employment, graduate education, and other opportunities. The workshop specifically works with students to articulate their experiences in formats such as résumés and job letters, to recast their overseas experiences and new skills in terms that potential employers will value, and to polish their self-presentation skills. The re-entry workshop, especially, is built upon best practices and strategies adopted from human resources.

At the same time that Professionalisation is framed in pragmatic terms and speaks to students’ concerns about their future after finishing their degrees, however, the goals of the Professionalisation module more generally are to help students recognise and communicate the growth and development that they will have undergone due to international exchange and study abroad, especially in other parts of the Bringing the Learning Home curriculum. The recognition that their newfound skills, capacity to adapt, expanded cultural analysis abilities, and increased global awareness are themselves marketable can help students to better see the value of these changes to their own lives and goals.
Mode of delivery

The Professionalisation module is designed to allow flexible delivery. Most of the content of the module is to be delivered after students return from their sojourns abroad. Although we recommend alerting students to Professionalisation goals and opportunities prior to departure (see the Pre-Departure portions of this module for a discussion), the majority of the material is probably best conducted as a re-entry workshop or, less ideally, as a self-study option.

We provide the materials for the module in a number of formats, for both self study and for directed workshop. We strongly advocate a guided workshop with a well-prepared facilitator, but have included materials for both forms of presentation. A face-to-face workshop allows students to ask questions, which they generally have as they try to think about how to cast their individual experiences into the forms appropriate for professional communication, and to rehearse their self presentations, such as the ‘elevator talk,’ with each other.

Pre-departure
Some pre-departure material is intended to alert students to possibilities for professional development while abroad. See the material provided below and as part of this module.

In country
In general, the activities included in this module do not require reinforcement while travelling abroad or studying in host universities. The current version of this module contains no recommended material for in-country use.

Re-entry
Most of the material is designed for a re-entry workshop or self-study. We suggest at least an hour, but ideally, a two-hour workshop allows the facilitator and students to get through all the material at an appropriate pace. Even at two hours, students and facilitator are likely to feel like they have covered a lot of material, especially if some time is set aside for the exercises.

Many users will find that the module serves best toward the end of re-entry programming, even as the final activity prior to wrap-up and evaluation. Professionalisation contexts provide settings and challenges in which students will be able to specifically apply the skills that they develop in study abroad settings and in the Bringing the Learning Home curriculum. Many of the lessons from other modules feed organically the exercises in the Professionalisation module.
This **instructor's guide** includes a discussion of the module’s goals, rationale and strategies, a thorough presenter’s guide for the workshop, additional resources and readings, and references.

**Slides** (in Prezi, Apple Keynote and Microsoft Powerpoint) are provided for both a brief pre-departure orientation and a much more substantial re-entry workshop on Professionalisation skills (see OzStudentsAbroad website for links).

**Student guide** (available if the module will be run through self-study).

**Video** examples of workshop being run, available through OzStudentsAbroad on YouTube. A complete list is available at the end of this guide, and various sections have links to videos during which specific concepts were discussed.

If you are preparing your own reader to accompany study abroad, the student guide materials are all made available under a Creative Commons licence. You are free to incorporate the materials into your own reader or course package as long as you clearly attribute the origin of the work (see Creative Commons licence). The creators also include in the licence the option of using the work for commercial gain, although we respectfully ask that the material not be republished and sold (we hope that the workshop materials will be useful to both university-based and commercial providers).
Instructor’s orientation

On the surface, the goals of the professionalisation module are relatively straightforward: help students to recognise and to articulate in professional settings the benefits of study abroad, especially their improved cross-cultural skills, personal growth, and ability to adapt. For this reason, Professionalisation generally serves well in the re-entry program as a final stage of discussion, as the material builds upon the insights gained in the Transformation, Globalisation, Adaptation and Cultural Relativism modules. In a superficial way, this module is about packaging and describing the forms of growth and learning discussed in other modules so that they might be used in job interviews, on résumés, or in scholarship and graduate school applications.

On a deeper level, however, highlighting the theme of professionalisation in the pre-departure and re-entry programming that accompanies study abroad can increase student seriousness and engagement in their overseas experience. Helping students to see long-range opportunities can assist them to treat their sojourns abroad as much more than extended study-vacations or travel opportunities, encouraging them to gain greater intercultural, pre-professional and related experience. Research shows that students who seek to study abroad often have international or intercultural career ambitions, and that study abroad can help to produce new opportunities in global fields (see Norris and Gillespie 2009).

Our experience has been that students are very receptive to the professionalisation material, especially in re-entry, and that offering professionalisation can make voluntary re-entry programs more attractive, so offering ‘professionalisation’ is one of the best ways to get students to attend for other programming as well if your program is voluntary rather than required. On several of our test campuses, re-entry activities were voluntary, and international studies officers commented that the Professionalisation Workshop was one of their best attended activities in recent memory.

Students initially may be sceptical that talking about studying abroad is a good tactic in job interviews. This suspicion is well founded: in some cases, students can talk too much about international experience or keep referring to studying overseas with a job interviewer who finds the discussion off-putting or distracting. We will cover this in the workshop, but we do not encourage students to adapt this self-presentation strategy without observing carefully their audience.
Just as likely, however, many students find that interviewers are fascinated by their international experience. When one of our board members discussed professional advantages with a group of returned students, a member of the audience raised his hand to say that he couldn’t imagine how or why he would talk about his time overseas with an interviewer. Before the board member could really even answer, two other students raised their hands to say that they had recently finished interviews in which they were asked extensively about their international exchange. One said that in an interview for a law firm, she talked about nothing else except France with the interviewer and soon got a job offer.

The point of this contradiction is that study abroad or international exchange itself is usually not what makes students different: it’s how they describe what they’ve learned, how they’ve changed, and the qualities that they’ve demonstrated that is crucial. Students must learn to talk more about the effects of studying abroad and less about just the fact of travel, or what they have experienced, as part of achieving professional goals through their experience. In the module, we specifically argue that they need to change ‘travel stories’ about weird experiences, difficult situations, and dramatic events into ‘career stories’ about coping strategies, problem-solving philosophy, and lessons learned.

For this reason, the goals of the Professionalisation module are multi-tiered, and it can serve as an excellent conclusion and re-exploration of themes from the other Bringing the Learning Home modules. Because students tend to recognise the value of this topic, professionalisation or ‘career building’ workshops, especially after study abroad, can be used to touch on other important goals, such as increasing reflective practice or helping students to understand cultural relativism. Depending on the goals of your program and the resources available, consider using the professionalisation workshop materials together with other re-entry materials to build an effective workshop that is attractive to students. Our pilot Re-entry Workshops often used the professionalisation material extensively, and students will typically understand the value of reflecting on their study abroad program, discussing globalisation, or ‘re-storying’ their experiences better if students are shown how these intellectual processes contribute to portfolio building and performing well in interviews.

**Workshop or self-study**

In general, we believe that the Professionalisation module, although it is content-rich, works better as a workshop than as self-study material. Students may benefit especially from interaction and rehearsal as they discuss how to reframe their experience in small groups or hear each other’s questions during the workshop (the module exercises provide the foundations for these discussions). For some university students, thinking about how to market their educational experiences to employers may be unfamiliar, so working together as a group can be to their benefit.

The minimalist worksheet provided with the Professionalisation module contains no
instructions and is designed to be accompanied by the slideshow or Prezi and presented by a prepared facilitator. The minimalist worksheet is intended to provide minimal distraction so that students pay attention to the presentation and discussion with the facilitator and do not read ahead. This approach has been specifically arrived at from our experience running these workshops: not providing competing information or instructions on the worksheet tends both to increase student curiosity and to decrease the possibility that the worksheet will generate distraction or encourage students to feel that they’ve already ascertained the outcomes of the exercises.

Self-study materials are provided, however, including an online screencast version of the workshop and self-study worksheets with more extensive instruction. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that an interactive workshop, in which students complete the minimalist worksheets available as part of this module, is the best possible way to deliver the Professionalisation module. The more comprehensive worksheets and student exercise sheets are more appropriate for a self-study application of the workshop materials or other setting in which a prepared facilitator is not available. Although self-study is not the preferred presentation mode, we also provide this mode of delivery so that students who are finding this material on their own, or international studies offices without capacity to deliver the workshop, still can make use of the material.
American social psychologist George Gardiner argued that some individuals were ‘universal communicators’: they had such exceptional empathy, extroverted personalities, social confidence, grasp of ‘universal values,’ and near supernatural intuition that they could function in virtually any setting (Gardner 1962: 248). Many of those who study intercultural communication and adaptation, although not as enthusiastic as Gardiner, agree that individuals can develop knowledge, skills, and traits that transfer across cultural settings, making them more likely to succeed in intercultural settings in overcoming misunderstandings and communication breakdowns.

But the concept of a generalised ‘intercultural competence’ is controversial; Herzog, for example, argues that the idea of a pan-cultural ‘competence’ ‘is just as hollow a concept’ as arguing that people gain generalised ‘language proficiency’ when they learn a foreign language (Herzog in Rathje 2007: 257). In fact, many skills gained overseas are ‘site specific’ forms of adaptation and knowledge that create a locally-based expertise. But a growing literature focuses on the sorts of traits and tendencies that transfer across cultures, providing the basis of a generalised competency (see Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001; Deardorff 2004, 2009).

The Bringing the Learning Home project team believes that neither extreme is accurate. Certainly, students can develop qualities that make subsequent cross-cultural situations less upsetting and disorienting, but, at the same time, no uniform set of traits characterises all individuals who travel well, nor do the same strategies serve equally well in every cultural context. Students will become adept crossing cultures in culture-specific ways – one will develop greater gregariousness, another stoicism and self-sufficiency, another adapt so fully as to become ‘bi-cultural’ – and their host countries will shape the strategies for adaptation that are available. To argue that the same ‘cross-cultural competence’ is formed by travelling to Tokyo or to a university town in the Midwestern United States, to study Arabic in Cairo, engineering in Sweden, or economic development in Fiji, flies in the face of the obvious diversity in challenges that each setting poses. The same skills that may make one
‘competent’ in one setting may prove inadequate in another, or an approach that works with one member of the host culture may fail with another member of the same ‘culture’ (see Spitzberg 2000).

However, some traits will potentially be of use, and for this reason, talking of ‘intercultural competence’ will alert students to the skills that they may have developed during their sojourns overseas. Bennett and Bennett (2001: 149) define intercultural competence as a combination of ‘mindset’ and ‘skillset’ (see also Byram 1997 on the five ‘savoirs’):

While the primary emphasis of intercultural communication is on behavior, no behavior exists separately from thought and emotion. This necessary unity can be called the intercultural mindset and skillset. The mindset refers to one’s awareness of operating in a cultural context. This usually entails some conscious knowledge of one’s own culture (cultural self-awareness), some frameworks for creating useful cultural contrasts (e.g., communication styles, cultural values), and a clear understanding about how to use cultural generalizations without stereotyping. The mindset (or better, “heartset”) also includes the maintenance of attitudes such as curiosity and tolerance of ambiguity that act as motivators for seeking out cultural differences.

The intercultural skillset includes the ability to analyze interaction, predict misunderstanding, and fashion adaptive behavior. The skillset can be thought of as the expanded repertoire of behavior—a repertoire that includes behavior appropriate to one’s own culture, but which does not thereby exclude alternative behavior that might be more appropriate in another culture.

The implication of this approach to intercultural competence is that knowledge, attitude, and behavior must work together for development to occur…

As Spitzberg and Changnon (2009: 45-6) suggest in a review of the literature on intercultural competence, over 300 theoretically distinct constructs have appeared in the literature, suggesting that, although scholars cannot agree, they do widely consider intercultural skills and communication an important area of continued investigation and theoretical refining.

---

1 Michaël Byram (1997) provides a general framework, discussing the five ‘savoirs’ or forms of knowledge that make up intercultural communicative competence: attitudes such as openness and curiosity (savoir être); knowledge of other people (savoirs); interpretive skill (savoir comprendre); knowledge of how to learn and explore (savoir apprendre or savoir faire); and critical cultural and self knowledge (savoir s’engager). In fact, although he calls them all uniformly ‘savoirs’, Byram’s framework suggests that a diverse range of attitudes, skills, and self-knowledge are all resources that may be used in intercultural communication.
In general, although we use the terms ‘intercultural’ and ‘cross-cultural competence’ because they have become widespread in the field (and because students will likely encounter human resources people who are, themselves, familiar with these concepts), we shy away from some of the implications of the terms for pedagogy. ‘Competence’ can suggest that intercultural communication is primarily an individual achievement, and that the ‘competence’ in this area can be mastered and then claimed, as if to say that a person is cross-culturally ‘competent.’ Fantini (2000: 29) highlights the openness and incompleteness of this type of ‘competence’:

While acknowledging that contact and experience with people of other languages and cultures in a positive setting provide excellent opportunities to provoke and foster ICC [intercultural competence] development, it is also clear that once the process has begun, ICC development is an on-going and lengthy — often a lifelong — process. Occasionally, individuals experience moments of regression or stagnation, but normally there is no end point. One is always in the process of “becoming,” and one is never completely “interculturally competent.” Although we may develop and expand our competencies, new challenges always exist. Like the speaker of two or more languages, one rarely attains complete and native-like fluency in the subsequent systems one enters beyond the native system.

As we suggest in the Cultural Relativism, Adaptation, and Exploration modules, students are quite likely to come up against new challenges, unexpected dimensions of other cultures, and settings that will make them feel quite incompetent, even if they are seasoned travellers and skilful negotiators. For example, a veteran anthropologist who had spent years in the field felt terribly confronted when travelling in India for the first time; although he was skilled in taking others’ perspectives and respecting difference in some settings – he was exemplary in his ‘intercultural competence’ – he found
unfamiliar patterns of poverty, social exclusion, physical sensations, and communication problems made him suffer a profound ‘culture shock.

International exchange should inspire a confidence based, not on being convinced that one already knows everything one needs to know, but on recognising that one is sufficiently resourceful, resilient and unafraid of appearing temporarily foolish to make the transition to greater proficiency. In other words, part of teaching students to cross cultures is to persuade them to venture outside their cultural comfort zone, to welcome or at least tolerate the feeling of incompetence that almost invariably precedes adaptation (see also Gordon 2010).

Similarly, the workshop-based discussion of ‘cross-cultural competency’ should open up students to discuss various strategies for adapting to new settings, in part so that they are more likely to experiment with various approaches to these challenges when they face intercultural situations in the future. As students become better at intercultural communication, they will realise that the ‘circulation of values and identities across cultures,’ does not necessarily mean that everything that looks familiar really is. There are ‘inversions, even inventions of meaning, often hidden behind a common illusion of effective communication’ (Kramsch, Lévy and Zarate, cited in Kramsch 2011: 356).

The Bringing the Learning Home team presents the idea of ‘cross-cultural competence’ or ‘intercultural competence’ as a varying constellation of skills rather than a single, global ‘competency.’ We do so primarily for teaching purposes. This ‘competency,’ students should recognise, is a whole cluster of abilities, including empathy, cultural relativism, self-awareness, patience, creative problem solving, emotional self-control, and, in some cases, foreign language proficiency. In this workshop, we focus on the most generalizable skills developed by a sojourn abroad in a single culture, recognising that some skills that helped students to adapt are more portable to new settings than others. The point is not to convey to students a fixed definition of ‘intercultural competency,’ but rather to encourage them to identify and describe how they have cultivated their own portfolio of intercultural skills and strategies.

‘Portfolio’

We use the concept of ‘portfolio’ loosely in the Professionalisation module, but the general significance follows the use of the term in tertiary education. Increasingly, students are encouraged to produce examples of their work that might be shown to potential employers or post-graduate programs and used for other purposes, such as external competitions or application for graduate school or competitive scholarship. A degree or academic transcript alone is typically seen as a minimal credential; ideally, students will develop other materials or demonstrations of their abilities. Portfolios have long been used in creative arts, design, marketing, and related fields, but the practice has expanded to other majors and fields.
The Bringing the Learning Home program encourages students to see some of their stories, accomplishments, and other achievements while on international programs as parts of a portfolio, even if they are intangible. These elements, if they are properly framed, can become evidence of some of the more difficult-to-demonstrate qualities that employers seek, so considering them part of a broader ‘portfolio’ can help students to feel confident in answering the sorts of questions they will face in interviews.

‘Career stories’

Part of the reflection-based curriculum in Bringing the Learning Home is a recognition of the important role stories play in remembering and learning from experience. In this module we specifically attempt to point out to students the traits of ‘travel stories’ and help them to recraft some of their travel stories for a professional audience.

Students may be surprised to talk about ‘framing’ of stories, but you should point out to them that storytelling is an art. If they don’t recognise this, simply point out to them that just about everyone knows somebody who is a terrible storyteller: they don’t get to the point, don’t know how to tell a joke, or otherwise can’t build the drama or interest necessary to make a story work. (See also the module on Communication for more discussion of storytelling.)

If possible, we find that giving students an example of reframing from their own reflections or travel stories can work really well. If the discussion of career stories is happening as part of a re-entry workshop, or if the students have been engaged in a longer program that includes in-country reflections or discussions, the facilitator of the Professionalisation workshop may identify some of the stories or reflections of the students themselves that may make excellent examples for a discussion of story reframing.

In the Prezi version of the Professionalisation Re-entry Workshop, for example, we offer the story of an Australian student who joined an intermural hockey team while in Canada. In the travel story version, the student might highlight his hapless attempt to skate, the fact that he could only stop by running into something or falling down, that he successfully saved a goal only because he couldn’t skate down the ice to go on offense with the rest of his team. All of these sorts of elements – drama, humour, the incongruous, scary or wacky – make for great and memorable travel stories.
The example of the hockey misadventure in Canada can also make a great career story; instead of focusing on graphic descriptions of crashing into other players, the bruises the student had the next day, or how much fun the whole episode was, the student might shift to what he learned. A simplified version of the narrative ‘set-up’ – ‘I joined an intramural hockey team while in Canada, and I was terrible’ – could then lead into an excellent reflection on what the student learned: that ‘having a go’ and participating, even when hapless, were more important for generating cross-cultural cooperation and good relations than being a good hockey player (or karaoke singer or samba dancer). Or that, even though a sense of adventure is crucial to the student, he learned that sometimes you have to learn from mistakes and leave some tasks to the experts. Or that, just because you get lucky and stop a goal once, because you’re in the right place at the right time, that doesn’t necessarily make you a good hockey player.

A good reframing of a story as a ‘career story’ can help a student with the objectives of the Reflection module (personal growth, recognising the lessons from experience) at the same time that the reframing allows him or her to make greater pragmatic use of these experiences for purposes like doing well in job interviews. For more information on ‘re-storying,’ see the Communication module and the discussion in the Reflection module.
To prepare for running the workshops in the Professionalisation module, the Bringing the Learning Home team strongly recommends that the workshop facilitator become very familiar with the material. We would recommend setting aside a minimum of two hours to familiarise yourself with the material, think about examples from your own life or teaching and advising, and even to incorporate students’ own materials into the workshop. The workshop is deceptively difficult and benefits from a bit of preparation, both practical and mental. Consider reviewing the more comprehensive version of the workbook for self-study, or printing material off to have it available for the facilitator, even though students are provided only with the minimalist version of the worksheet.

One warning: the slides do not contain all the information necessary for the workshop. The slides and Prezi were designed based on the assumption that slides should support, not dictate, a presentation, and that student engagement is highest when facilitators are not simply reading an outline from projected slides. Many elements are available in this facilitator’s book that are not included in the slides or worksheets. If an International Office advisor or instructor tries to present the material ‘on the fly,’ without adequate preparation, the workshop can wind up excessively abstract, and students especially need help with concrete examples.

We also encourage facilitators to remove extraneous slides if this part of the module is embedded in a larger re-entry workshop or presented in shortened format. Too many slides, and too much text on the slides, can reinforce passive attitudes in students, and a workshop can turn into a lecture. The more active, engaged and responsive the students, the better they will find the workshop and the more they will leave feeling that they have concrete and
useful products that will prove valuable later, such as elements for their résumés, ideas about how they might include their exchange experience in cover letters, or the start of a strong ‘elevator talk’.

The Bringing the Learning Home project team believes strongly that design matters, and has specifically produced these slides so that they have clear visual themes and recurring elements. However, due to the demands of your program, you may wish to delete a few slides or borrow only a few elements, such as an exercise or set of examples. We only require that you attribute the source, but encourage adaptation and re-deployment of the materials to meet the needs of your specific program. For this reason, the materials are made available through a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported Licence (see links in the front material or on the project website for more information).

We encourage adaptation and elaboration of the workshop material so that it responds to your students’ distinctive experiences and needs. For example, if you are running the photo reflection module, using either a photo blog or photo competition, consider using some of these photos to prompt students in the discussion of turning travel stories into career stories. The examples we use are drawn from our own experience conducting these workshops, online blogs to support international exchange, advising international students, and related activities. Over time, many users will wish to alter the materials to include their own stories and examples, discarding exercises that don’t work for their audience, and otherwise refining the materials.

‘Invisible’ titles are embedded on each slide (they can be found and deleted if the presenter desires as they are simply text in the same colour as the background). Most slideshow presenters will read these slide titles so that, if the numbering is changed by the presenter, the notes appropriate for each slide will still be available.

Some videotape versions of our own pilot workshops are available if presenters would like to become more familiar with the material prior to presenting it. See the Resources list at the end of this module for a complete list of these video clips.

A videotape of a presentation of this part of the workshop – an early variation – is available for viewing at: Significance: What Employers Want (14:35) http://youtu.be/2TAUWypEnNM. This video shows team member, Greg Downey, presenting on many of the subjects covered in this module at a re-entry workshop.
The pre-departure portion of this module is brief and can be included in an overarching pre-departure program. The most important objective of the predeparture briefing in the Professionalisation module is simply to alert students to opportunities while overseas, specifically in language learning, courses available only while overseas, and other related extra-curricular issues. The most important pre-departure strategies for sojourning overseas, in the opinion of the Bringing the Learning Home project team, are the attitudes, approaches, and skills discussed in the Adaptation, Exploration, and Cultural Relativism modules. All of these, for the most part, can flow on into the Professionalisation workshop at re-entry through reframing and restorying of experience.

In general, the Professionalisation pre-departure workshop can work well with the Exploration pre-departure materials, shifting the discussion toward practical and forward-looking strategies. Many students will better see the value of exploration when they think about the benefits within a framework of gaining greater pre-professional credentials.

**Slides 1 & 2: Titles 1 & 2**

Both have space to place the name of the facilitator and logo of the home university or program. Consider placing any announcements or slides detailing student resources or opportunities prior to start of the workshop material on slide 3.

**Slide 3: Strategies: Getting the most out of your experience**

The discussion in the pre-departure activity can link to the ‘bucket list’ exercise in the Exploration module. What are the students’ strategies for getting the most out of their experience overseas, not just in terms of personal development, fun, or travel stories, but also credentials, achievements or skills that may be relevant to their future profession.

Remind students that ‘professionalisation’ (and this discussion) is not just about getting a job (although that’s crucial): they should also think about their future opportunities to travel, understanding of world events, ability to get scholarships, gaining greater facility in mixing with visiting colleagues, etc. All of these dimensions of their own personal ‘globalisation’ potentially will be richer because of overseas experience.
The advice on getting the most professionally from exchange that we give to students is virtually the same as getting the most academically, culturally and intellectually from their sojourn: expose themselves to their new home, get outside their comfort zone, soak up information, do things they wouldn’t do back home...

The difference will be in re-entry, when the module specifically discusses how to talk about this experience and leverage it into opportunity. However, there are some things that students might consider before going abroad in terms of strategies for maximum effect...

**Slide 4: Study abroad to stand out**

*Studying abroad makes a student distinctive: less than 5% do any sort of travel for education (exchange, language trip)*. Encourage students to recognise that they have distinguished themselves in terms of their courage, independence, curiosity, adaptability, versatility, ambition appetite for adventure -- all things that employers will be looking for.

*Studying abroad should be fun, exciting, and memorable, but it’s not just a vacation.*

Sometimes students can draw too firm a line between ‘studying’ and ‘being abroad.’ They take courses that they could take back home (and some universities seem to encourage this) and then just go sightseeing on the side. Some of the most important learning will be outside the classroom and non-academic, but it can contribute directly to your résumé and ability to perform well in interviews and jobs. We encourage students to do things that they could NOT do if they stayed home; no reason to leave if all they want to do is to bring home along with them or recreate a semester’s curriculum while overseas (although, again, some universities and majors may make this a challenge because of tight constraints).

**Having a memorable experience and building career credentials are compatible,** even parallel goals, but not if a student’s adventure is purely clubbing, drinking, and superficial travelling. Having once-in-a-lifetime experiences is part of what employers will want to hear about, if those experiences are truly exploration, growth, and reflect your best qualities.
This slide will re-appear in the re-entry Professionalisation workshop to reinforce this point, but prior to departure, it is helpful to alert students to opportunities overseas during their exchange programs. We focus in pre-departure on the first three bullet points on this slide, but this is the core of the pre-departure workshop. If only a limited time is available, we recommend focusing on this material in pre-departure.

Point 1. ‘Courses’: If possible, while overseas, consider taking courses or units that cannot be taken back at your home institution; sometimes these courses can also leverage local advantages. For example, a Shakespeare course in England, where one can attend plays, is a much richer experience. A course on Chinese history in China, where one can see some of the key sites, offers ways of building greater academic expertise, but also making sight-seeing and extra-curricular activities more engaging. Studying European Union politics or legal structure with European students, or development studies with classmates in Latin America or the Pacific, can be an invaluable aid to gain a deeper knowledge of one’s field. These sorts of courses make it easy to argue that study abroad is directly contributing to greater expertise in one’s profession.

In some cases, you may not be able to do everything you want to do academically within the strict confines of your program or requirements back home. But don’t let your intellectual development be constrained by requirements. Ask to sit in on the lectures for a class, even if you can’t get credit for it, if it’s really something you want to know. Get on the mailing list for the host university’s department in your major so that you hear if famous researchers or speakers are visiting. One lecture or presentation may be more valuable to you in terms of your own growth and development than a whole semester of a required course, so don’t let yourself be trapped by narrow thinking. Seize opportunities, even if they are not going to show up on your transcript because you can make them show up on your résumé or in interviews.

Point 2. ‘Professional experience’: In some cases, students have the opportunity to do an internship or work placement while abroad, and these experiences can be invaluable, not just for professionalisation, but also for helping a student to become more deeply integrated into the host community. But other, less demanding or formal options are possible, too: a student can arrange to meet for lunch someone working in the field he or she wants to enter,
even an Australian or fellow expatriate who has taken a position in the host country. Or arrange to visit a workplace directly linked to the student’s future occupation: an engineering student might arrange to tour an auto manufacturing plant and design firm while in Bavaria; a design student might take a tour of production facilities in Italy or a design museum. A student studying theology could visit different religious services, or a student of mine engineering arrange to tour a mine in Canada. These visits can be as interesting as any tourist activity – even more so – and the student will have some lasting points of discussion that are directly relevant to their future occupation.

3. ‘Language skills’: Even just a smattering of a foreign language can be an advantage on a résumé in Australia and other countries where multilingualism is rare. By gaining basic language ability, the student doesn’t just demonstrate knowledge of that particular place, but the ability to gain a challenging skill. In addition, most students report that, even attempting to learn some of the host country’s language can be a great ice-breaker and introduction to local people.

4. ‘Destination-specific expertise’: This point specifically refers to knowledge about local customs, culture, politics, or other relevant areas.

Learning about the country in which you are doing your exchange can become a point of differentiation. You can become a kind of ‘expert’ in Portugal or Hungary or Chile or South Korea. Of course, you’ll always claim, ‘Well, I’m no expert, BUT…’ and if you have something intelligent to say about the difference in television advertising in your host country or how social services are supplied or educational policy, interviewers are liable to be impressed. Moreover, treating your destination as a field for research can simply make your experience much deeper and more engaging; local news will make more sense, local tourist sites will mean more, and you’ll feel like you’re doing more than having a superficial, tourist experience.

As we discuss in the re-entry workshop, this process of growing into an expert in the host country need not stop when the student returns home. However, paying attention to local news can make the process a lot more interesting and engaging (see also the Exploration module for an expanded discussion of this goal).

5. ‘Cohort-specific expertise’: Since most exchange students will come into contact with other international students, they have an opportunity to learn about people and cultures other than the host culture. In some cases, they will have quite strong relationships with fellow international students from other countries; these, too, are opportunities to become more familiar with global cultures.
Slide 6: Significance

The point of this wrap up question, ‘How will I get my first professional experience?’, is simply to highlight for students that study abroad can be a real point of differentiation. Many struggle with the divide between university and professional life, especially fearing that their lack of ‘experience’ will be held against them – and it may in fact be a stumbling point.

But students may also find that they can leverage experience overseas to help answer some of the questions that come up around ‘experience’ in job interviews:

*Many of you will be asking later, ‘Every job ad asks for experience – how am I supposed to get experience?’*

*One answer to this question is...*

Slide 7: Study abroad as ‘experience’

*...study abroad.*

*By getting the most out of your experience, by taking advantage of opportunities and demonstrating your abilities, you will be providing evidence of the qualities that people look for in ‘experience.’*

*You may not practise a trade overseas, but you will demonstrate many of the qualities that make you stand out. Studying abroad is one way to stand out.*

The point is not that, when an employer asks for ‘experience’ on an application, the student writes, ‘International exchange.’ The idea is that, when an interviewer asks about ‘experience,’ the question may also be about looking for certain qualities that can be demonstrated with international experience: initiative, engagement in the occupation, knowledge of how the field works. We will return to this in the Professionalisation re-entry workshop.
Slides 8, 9 & 10: Closing, credits, and licence.

Although you are free to modify the slides, attribution is a condition of the Creative Commons licence for use. Please include contact and licensing information for the Bringing the Learning Home project with any modification or adaptation of the slides. In addition, we welcome communication about the program, including how the materials have worked in your international exchange programming.
Re-entry workshop

**Slides 1 & 2: Title slides 1 & 2**

Both have space to place the name of the facilitator and logo of the home university or program. Consider placing any announcements or slides detailing student resources or opportunities prior to start of the workshop material on slide 3.

One thing to emphasise as the facilitator opens the workshop is that, for some students, the topic of professionalisation may seem very pressing, even urgent. For others, the topic may seem remote, especially if they are not yet in their last year of university. However, thinking in advance about how students will present themselves is an excellent exercise to do in advance. Only considering how a university career might look to a job interviewer the night before the application deadline is a risky strategy, and may result in the student leaving key information or ideas out of a job letter or résumé.

---

**Slide 3: Significance 1**

Students may think that their study abroad experience is over when they finish their return flight, that they’ve already gained everything that there is to gain because they’ve had exciting adventures (and some hard times), travelled extensively, and finished up their courses at the overseas host. True, they’ve come through customs, and they may be back in their old bedroom or apartment, but that doesn’t mean that the significance of what they’ve done is already decided.

Their connection to their overseas host is still alive, and it can still bring new benefits, even create an opportunity to invest MORE in the advantages and opportunities created.

This workshop is about professional development, but it isn’t just about getting a job: we hope to encourage students to see new opportunities, to get the best possible professional position, to
be better able to secure graduate school admission, grants or scholarships, or promotions, to build upon their study abroad in new ways even after they return.

The key point for the opening, in the opinion of the BTLH team, is to emphasise the unfinished quality of study abroad, that students can still work to polish their experience, stories and presentation to gain greater advantage from their international exchange.

**Slide 4: Significance 2**

One question to ask is how does the study abroad experience intersect with what employers are looking for? Very few job ads will say, ‘Looking for a former exchange student.’ So we ask students, how their study abroad experience will fit into what most employers want?

In the workshop, we encourage students to see their experiences from the other side of the interviewer’s desk or from the point of view of the reader of their job letters or résumés. We have to consider what employers seeking to hire young people want to know about them. What are they looking for? What do they worry about? How can study abroad answer THEIR questions -- the employers’ questions?

The facilitator might briefly ask students to consider, why might study abroad in a job candidate or applicant for a position be interesting to the person making the decision who to hire or to appoint. The odds are that this person, the interviewer, will focus on a different set of issues to the ones that the students focused on before making the decision to go on international exchange.

**Slide 5: Significance 3 (workshop overview: five benefits)**

This slide is the summary – each of the five items is unpacked later (so this is a bit visually crowded; in the Prezi version, the presentation pulls back to review the whole workshop structure). These five categories are the dimensions of international experience through exchange or study abroad that might be directly relevant to an employer or interviewer.

1. **Placement-specific expertise**: qualities or training that have to do with the specific university or site that the student visited, such as language training, country expertise, an internship, strength in a particular academic program at host institution that is uncommon or
not available in Australia. [note: just touch on these categories in the overview. More complete discussion as the workshop gets to each one.]

2. ‘Soft skills’ and personal traits: General skills developed or refined by traveling to another place and living within a foreign culture. Soft skills also include general personality traits that are demonstrated and even reinforced by study abroad (adaptability, independence, resourcefulness). These traits are especially obvious in exchange students because they can be illustrated in...

3. Developing ‘career stories’: Career stories are specific, concrete examples of the previous soft skills and personal traits in action. Good career stories provide evidence of otherwise hard-to-show abilities; they can turn a vague job letter or interview answer (e.g., ‘I’m adaptable’) into a more persuasive concrete example.

4. Cross-cultural skills: Gaining experience overseas specifically develops skills that help people to cross cultures effectively, such as more versatile strategies for communicating, practise interpreting difference, and the ability to recognise their own Australianness or home culture orientation. (Skills discussed and developed specifically in other modules like Exploration, Adaptation, and Cultural Relativism)

5. Building your portfolio: ‘Portfolio building,’ once used to talk about more specialised collections of exemplary work in the arts or creative fields. The concept is here used to talk about how, with reflection and preparation, study abroad can generate concrete and lasting elements that become part of one’s academic record or can be used to document personal achievement, in a way that the average semester at the home institutions may not. A ‘portfolio’ may be tangible objects, such as publications or websites, but it may also be a remembered repertoire of polished, pre-prepared answers, examples, and evidence that the student can use in interviews or applications.

A videotape of a presentation of this part of the workshop – an early variation – is available for viewing at: Overview Professional Development (5:13) http://youtu.be/e2F5DPJvEp. This video shows team member, Alexandra Haaxman, presenting the workshop overview.
The facilitator should emphasise to students that choosing to study abroad or go on exchange is a self-selecting choice, one that many students do not make, so it shows a level of initiative and independence by the very fact of choosing it. A small minority of university graduates do study abroad, so, if used effectively, international exchange can be a real point of differentiation that makes a students stand out.

‘Employers’ may not realise...’: This point is perhaps the most important one in this part of the presentation: employers will not simply be impressed by the fact that the student studied abroad. We tell them that just putting, ‘I studied abroad in the UK,’ on their résumé will not really be persuasive.

What WILL be persuasive is what the students have done. As we put it:

You’ve lived alone, managed a budget, learned a completely new educational and social system, and a whole host of other things. Don’t focus too much on the privilege -- some potential employers may even resent the fact that you had it -- but instead focus on your skills, competence, initiative, etc. Rather than talk about partying and living like a college student, emphasise instead your coping, negotiation, initiative, and industry. Your interviewer may already realise that exchange is challenging; if he or she doesn’t know, however, be prepared to make the case based on specific examples and clear arguments.

This means that you are not selling the mere ‘fact’ of travel or study abroad, but the ‘effects’ of study abroad on you. You are more aware, cosmopolitan, independent, confident, competent, savvy, flexible, versatile, better able to work with diverse people, etc.

This workshop is about specifying the details in this argument, so students should pay attention in case they run into a sceptic of exchange. In some cases, they will run into fellow proponents of study abroad, but we can’t count on it.
Slide 7: Placement-specific expertise

This slide is included in the pre-departure Professionalisation workshop, but we include it again here so that we remind students to include these items in their growing ‘portfolio.’ The top three items in the bullet points are the MOST OBVIOUS and the ones that especially need to be emphasised in pre-departure as they are generally not possible to retro-fit to a finished placement.

Points 1 & 2. ‘Courses’ and ‘Professional experience’: Remind students that they may have courses or work experience that are unavailable in Australia. Remind them to make sure to emphasise these. If they’ve done a lab internship in a field that’s better developed overseas, or had a seminar on EU law that is not taught in Australia, or seen firsthand the way urban planning in Europe accommodates bicycle commuters, these experiences need to be featured. For humanities and social sciences students, courses on the host country’s history, art, culture or social life can also feed into the fourth item on this list.

3. ‘Language skills’: Even just a smattering of a foreign language is a difference in Australia. It’s not just the specific language, but the ability and resourcefulness to get by in a non-English-speaking area that demonstrates your adaptability and intelligence. Put this on your résumé! ‘Basic conversational Spanish’ picked up through a student’s own initiative is an impressive demonstration of adaptability.

4. ‘Destination-specific expertise’: IMPORTANT FOR FACILITATOR: Remind students that, for the purposes of this expertise, the exchange is NOT OVER! Students can still make themselves an expert in the country they visited.

For some of you, you’ve learned a lot, but maybe you don’t feel like an ‘expert’ in your host. That’s okay -- there’s time to do that now! Put an electronic newspaper on your feed reader from your host country, follow prominent organisations in your field back in your host country on Facebook, check out movies or music from this country. You can leverage your experience into greater and greater expertise. The point is not just the narrow credential -- ‘I’m an expert on Denmark’ -- but the ABILITY to self-skill. If someone asks you do you think you can learn something needed for a job, you can tell them: ‘Of course I can figure out software licensing
Students can also follow up study abroad by continuing to study that country. If they are interested in health care or primary education or arts policy, why not do some research into how these things were handled in the host country? Ask the students to imagine how an interviewer might be interested if the student can explain how the Canadian medical system works or why German engineers’ training is different to that offered in Australia (for example, as they discuss in the Education and Culture module). In other words, ask students to consider how they can continue to build international expertise in an area that is especially interesting to them.

5. ‘Cohort-specific expertise’: Remind students that they lived internationally, not just in a single nation. Many will have had experience that is much broader than just their host; it will include extensive contact with other international students. Reflecting on their relations with other international students, how other students saw their host country in distinctive ways, for example, might help the student to be able to talk about the challenges of international and cross-cultural cooperation much more broadly than just between Australians and people from the host country.

Exercise One

Placement specific expertise inventory

In the two-hour version of this workshop, we instruct students to take a few minutes to write down any ‘placement specific’ expertise on the appropriate space on the workshop worksheet. Usually, this exercise goes quite quickly as students may not have too many examples of these. If time permits, the facilitator might consider talking as a group about a few of the ideas students have, or breaking them up into smaller groups to explain to each other what they’ve written. We’ve provided a sample set of instructions here (and the self-study version has a more complete explanation), but this exercise should not provide too much guidance. Students may, however, need to talk to each other and brainstorm together to recognise all the possibilities here.

On the worksheet, where it provides space for ‘Placement specific expertise’ near the top, write down any skills that you specifically gained from your site overseas, especially if they were skills, classes, work-related placements, or other experiences that you would not have got had you stayed home in Australia during the semester. Did you learn any foreign language, even just a few conversational phrases? Did you take a class on the host country? Did you learn about your future industry overseas through any direct experience or conversations? List these experiences on the worksheet.
Slide 8: Soft skills 1 (list pt. 1)

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (USA) asked employers, if applicants have the same qualifications, what are the most important skills or traits? The top five items on the list in 2011 appear on slide 8.

The Bringing the Learning Home team suggests that four of these are arguably demonstrated well in study-abroad experiences. (Clicking to advance the slides will introduce the check marks indicating which four):

- you’ve had to learn to communicate more carefully, to be aware of how you communicate...
- you’ve had to work with people who are different to you, so you should be better at teamwork...
- you can demonstrate your analytical skills when you talk about cultural differences, and use the experience of being overseas for leverage to better analyse the situation you’re in now and …
- any student who went through the process to go abroad definitely demonstrated initiative by simply choosing to go outside your comfort zone.

Slide 9: Soft skills 2 (list pt. 2)

From the National Association of Colleges and Employers survey, this slide lists the answers which were ranked 6 to 10 by employers, if applicants had the same qualifications. Arguably, some of these traits are even more readily demonstrated in study abroad (three or even four).

Computer skills are the one item on this part of the list that is probably least relevant for international exchange, but if they have been blogging or communicating electronically, perhaps this would be applicable:

Your stories of obstacles can be transformed into stories of problem-solving – after all, if you made it home, then eventually, no matter what you faced, you did find a way [we return to this point in the ‘career stories’ section below]...
you’ve been writing and communicating in writing, meeting the new expectations of your host university (which may have been confusing and unfamiliar)...

Your interpersonal skills have been tested overseas, and you’re probably more aware of the non-conscious interpersonal skills (learning out how to perceive different communication styles, sense of humour, unfamiliar body language, interpersonal negotiation...)…

And probably most clearly of all, you’ve demonstrated a greater degree of flexibility and adaptability than your peers.

One of the key points to make to students is that, given equal credentials between two candidates, all ten of these items were ranked by employers as more important than either the candidate’s grade point average or the quality of the university that the student attended – even though the survey was conducted in the United States, where the reputation of universities are even more important than in Australia. That is, although we tend to refer to these as ‘soft skills,’ which may make them sound less important than ‘hard skills,’ we probably should refer to them as ‘essential skills.’ Most employers are convinced that technical skills can be taught on the job; the ten qualities on this list need to be present to give the student an advantage even getting the position.

**Slide 10: Soft skills descriptors**

The slide is merely intended as a stimulus to encourage students to think about possible examples; we usually leave it on the projector while students work alone. Afterwards, you might ask students how many of them thought of examples for each of the eight traits, perhaps stopping to discuss possible examples of experiences that would demonstrate those traits which students were least able to see in their study abroad experience.

Exercise Two

Hard examples of ‘soft skills’

Based on the list provided by National Association of Colleges and Employers survey (and included in edited form on the Professionalisation worksheet), the BTLH team usually stops at this stage of the workshop and asks students to think of two or three examples of times that they demonstrated during their exchange program one of the eight qualities sought by employers. These can be written in note form by the large ‘1 example,’ ‘2 example,’ and ‘3 example’ on the worksheet.

The word ‘example’ is a reminder that simply saying vaguely, ‘I have initiative,’ or ‘I am a good problem solver,’ is not as persuasive as having an example when these qualities were demonstrated. At this stage of the workshop, we are simply asking students to think and make notes as we return to crafting ‘career stories’ later in the workshop.

We strongly encourage students to make ‘soft skills’ into hard examples; that is, we encourage them to show a trait in their experience or in what they accomplished rather than just tell an interviewer that the students have a particular trait. For example, rather than saying, ‘I have good interpersonal skills,’ it is more effective to say, ‘The greatest challenge I faced to my interpersonal skills was working on a group architecture project while in Canada with group members from four different countries, two of whom did not speak English as a first language.’ The example shows that the student has good interpersonal skills.

Slide 11: Career stories

‘Career stories’ are a way to think about how students will need to reframe or reorganise their ‘travel stories’ in order to use them in professional contexts (see discussion of the term in the Instructor’s Orientation). That is, the same stories of drama, bizarre encounters, or funny misunderstandings can often, with a bit of thought, be transformed into stories about learning, skill improvement, problem-solving, and other positive traits of the student.

In particular, students need to ‘reframe’ travel stories to shift the emphasis away from the dramatic set up and creating the comic or dramatic tension that makes the story a good travel story, and concentrate instead on an after-the-fact assessment of what they learned, the traits
they demonstrated in confronting a challenge, or the strategy they used. Warn students that ‘career stories’ are not as fun to tell as ‘travel stories,’ and they probably don’t work as well for entertainment value. We tend to tell the students the following:

**Prepare in advance — a bit of rehearsal will not make you seem too well-rehearsed or overly polished (some students mistakenly fear this). A bit of preparation can decrease the likelihood of freezing or being unable to answer basic questions, or think of any examples.**

Most travel stories are front-heavy, whereas career stories are back heavy. That is, travel stories focus on the set-up: how things were strange, how you got into trouble, the first half of the story... Career stories diminish the set-up of the story and focus, instead, on the solution, learning, or outcome. For example, a travel story version will elaborate upon getting lost, the scary parts, the drama... A career story will do the set-up in one, non-dramatic sentence, and then discuss how you got out of the situation.

By de-emphasising the frustration, failure or bizarre, you use your post-success frame of mind rather than highlighting your ‘in-the-moment’ stress or confusion.

These stories then give you concrete examples that you can use to answer the very difficult job-interview questions; ‘Tell me about a time that you dealt with a challenge...’ ‘Can you describe how you’ve used your communication skills?’

For an example of a reframing of a ‘travel story’ to a ‘career story,’ see the discussion in the Instructor’s Background. The ‘Re-entry Worksheet: Professionalisation Workshop’ includes brief notes on this slide to remind students how to reframe their experiences.

**Slide 12: Cross-cultural skills**

Although ‘intercultural competency’ or ‘cross-cultural competency’ are difficult to define specifically (see the discussion above in the Instructor’s Orientation), students invariably have gained increased skill in interacting with diverse people and navigating cultural difference when they spend long periods abroad. Because the BTLH team believes that the skills people use to adapt when travelling internationally are themselves variable, we take an open approach to discussing ‘cross-cultural skills.’

The list that we provide on Slide 12 is intentionally open and non-systematic:
- ‘accustomed to navigating cultural difference’
- ‘able to accommodate local norms’
- ‘aware of my own culture’
- ‘savvy’
- ‘tolerate ambiguity’
- ‘negotiate well’
- ‘versatile communication skills’
- ‘tolerant’
- ‘open-minded’
- ‘can establish rapport’
- ‘cosmopolitan.’ Ask students to think about the skills or qualities that they may have most used when adapting abroad: for some, stoicism might have been crucial, for others, a sense of humour. Some might be likely to talk about learning to communicate better so that they can clearly articulate what they want; others have adapted by observing closely and imitating local behaviour. In other words, encourage students to think about their overarching strategies for coping and how these might transport to other settings. These abilities, whatever they might be, are the students’ distinctive set of cross-cultural skills.

*Cultural skills can be portable; they are not necessarily culturally specific, if you can think about them generally. That is, going to Japan or Norway or Canada doesn’t just mean that you know better how to get around in those countries, but that you also become better in general at operating within an alien context. We might call them ‘meta-skills’ or ‘cross-cultural skills’ in that you’ve learned better how to learn and adapt better.*

*In a new setting, you’re not going to be caught unsuspecting. You know what to expect better, can describe it, cope with it. You’ve figured out better your own personal coping strategies, including coping with both the exhilaration and stress. You’re probably more open-minded, observant and adaptable, because you’re*
better practised at these tasks. You’ve possibly dealt with culture shock before, and you know how to deal with the frustration when it feels like everything has suddenly become harder.

You’re also probably a bit more streetwise, savvy, and capable of handling a system in which you’ve got to suss out the rules. You can spot cultural differences and figure them out, not just stand there shocked by them, like you might have been the first time. In addition, you’ve got a better sense of your own strengths, your cultural biases and quirks, and can use this self-knowledge while interacting with others.

Exercise Three

Cross-cultural skills

In the two-hour version of this workshop, we instruct students to take a few minutes to write their own specific ‘cross-cultural skills’ based upon their own strategies for adapting, learning experiences, or biggest challenges. If time permits, the facilitator might consider talking as a group about a few of the ideas students have, or breaking them up into smaller groups to explain to each other what they’ve written. We’ve provided a sample set of instructions here together with a list on the Worksheet to help spur creativity and possible answers (and the self-study version has a more complete explanation). Students may, however, need to talk to each other and brainstorm together to recognise all the possibilities here.

A video of a BTLH team member presenting a discussion of cross-cultural skills is also available: Cross-cultural Skills (5:49) [http://youtu.be/MRImF6ZBvA0]. The video, however, is from an early incarnation of this workshop, so it does not integrate all of our current thinking on the topic following the research project and sample workshops.

On the worksheet, where it provides space for ‘Cross-cultural skills’ near the bottom, write down any skills, abilities or strategies that you specifically used while overseas, that you think you could use if you went off for another exchange at a new host country. The sheet has a number of examples to get you started. List these experiences on the worksheet. Try to have a concrete example of what you mean or where this ability came in handy because you’re quite likely to get asked about it.
Slide 13: Cross-cultural skills - descriptors

Experts in the field of study abroad and human resources identify the sorts of skills listed on this slide as some of the particular strengths gained or demonstrated in study abroad. Because we advocate an open-ended and individualised approach, students may think of other skills, abilities or traits that served them well in intercultural settings; make sure that they write these down in the four numbered places at the bottom of the worksheet.

Make very clear to students that they should not list a skill or ability on their résumé unless they have a specific example that they can use to illustrate it or very clearly understand the concept. A shorter list with which they are comfortable and can discuss in an interview is far superior to a long list of items on which they have a fragile grasp or cannot back up when pressed about the quality.

In addition, because coping strategies in cross-cultural settings can vary between individuals, and in different sites, all students are not likely to develop the same skills (see the discussion of Intercultural Competency in the Instructor’s Orientation above).

Slide 14: Portfolio building

During our workshop, we use this slide to clearly signal a change in direction. The previous exercises can be quite hard for some students, and the ones who are studying in quite specific professional fields or in highly specialised university courses may feel that the discussion of ‘cross-cultural skills’ and ‘soft skills’ may not be helping them as much as they would like. The following slides and exercises try to help students to specifically prepare elements for their résumés, for example, so that they have something tangible when they leave the workshop that they know will be useful. We use the following discussion to introduce the idea of ‘portfolio’ as a way of thinking about elements of a professional profile (see discussion above in the Instructor’s Orientation for greater detail):

*Portfolio building focuses specifically on translating skills, experiences and achievements into forms that are recognised on résumés, in job letters, and during interviews. Now let’s try to turn these skills and experiences into lines on your résumé, a more powerful job letter, and things you can use in interviews.*
Don’t be confused: ‘Portfolio’ is a metaphor as well as a physical object. The idea is that you create some coherent, evidence-filled account of what you can do, your passions and interests. Key is memorability, coherence, achievements... We don’t actually want you to make a physical object like a portfolio (although, of course, some of you may be in fields like design, marketing, photography or writing where you do need an actual portfolio).

In this portfolio, you don’t want to just repeat buzzwords without some concrete proof to back them up, or for your profile to sound so tailored to each offering that you appear to be a completely blank slate. The enemy of a good application or interview is being forgotten, unmemorable, faceless or overly vague, and that’s what we specifically want to address in our discussion of your portfolio.

Slide 15: Portfolio – résumé

We encourage students to specifically pull out their international exchange or study abroad as a separate entry under an ‘Education’ heading on their résumé or, when appropriate, to even create a special section below ‘Education’ with its own title. The separate section can highlight the exchange experience, especially when it is particularly significant. On the example on the slide, we have created a category, ‘international and cross-cultural experience.’

Exercise Four

Your résumé, international experience included

In this description of the international program, we encourage students to put down a mix of three elements, in addition to the formal description of the host institution: on the worksheet, we have called them ‘projects’, ‘skills’, and ‘soft skills.’ In the example, they are put together, as we think appropriate, but in the exercise, students are encouraged to think about and list them separately.

We encourage you to think about three different elements that might help you to highlight your international accomplishments on your résumé: projects, skills and soft skills. The example on the slide has all three, although they are put into a
single entry. On the worksheet, we want you to try to think of examples of all three so that you can polish them and put them on your résumé.

**First, projects:** What concrete class projects or assignments that you did overseas that might be examples of the kind of work you can do? We don’t need every assignment, but what were the major ones, especially if they were ‘international’ in any way? Did you give a presentation in class? Did you do locally-based research? Did you organise an activity? Did you put on an event of any sort? Not every one of these will be appropriate for your résumé – if you organised the ‘booze cruise’ on which everyone got food poisoning, maybe leave that off – but if you can think of a couple of examples, this will make your résumé more concrete.

**Second, skills:** Certainly, foreign language acquisition belongs here, even if only conversational. If you already have a section on your résumé for your foreign languages, especially if you are in a field like international studies where they are very important, you can still list a specific course like ‘Spanish for Business’ or ‘Intensive Swedish Conversation.’ Even if the job does not specifically ask for foreign languages, mastering a language demonstrates that you can learn difficult skills and are up for a challenge.

List other skills here as well: technical courses, computer programs, work that you did while an intern (although put the internship separately as well – this is just for any skills that you acquired overseas). In the example on the slide, skills like ‘digital magazine production’ and ‘designing a Powerpoint presentation in Dutch’ are concrete skills. Even if the interviewer doesn’t care about Dutch or magazines, the evidence shows you can up-skill for diverse demands.

**Finally, soft skills:** here is the opportunity to put down – sparingly – your cross-cultural or soft skills, but be very selective. The trick to putting them here is to realise that, especially if they’re vague (like, ‘good cross-cultural negotiator’ or ‘adapts well to new environment’), the candidate is begging to be asked about them. That is, if someone from human resources reads a claim like ‘cross-cultural communication skills,’ he or she is quite likely to ask, ‘What do you mean by “cross-cultural communication skills”?’ The student should be ready with a good answer.
This means that the student may also be able to seed an interview question here, to say something that gets the interviewer to ask a question about a trait that the students wants to talk about. So being selective can mean channelling the interview into a direction that shows the job candidate in a very good light. For example, if the student has a really stand-out achievement organising other international students or has really powerful experience from a home-stay or other relevant material that he or she cannot get into the résumé elsewhere, creating an obvious opening in the résumé, a provocation for a question, can be a way to make sure that the issue gets raised in an interview.

The bottom line here is that more is not necessarily better: don’t list every possible skill or cross-cultural skill you can think of. Focus on the most relevant and the ones that show the student in the best light. An unfocused résumé can be hard to follow on from in an interview, especially if the student makes claims that cannot be backed up.

In this workshop, we give students a chance to write, but generally do not stop to discuss too much. We often find that students have questions, so taking a few questions can be good here. Emphasise to students that, in most fields, they have quite a bit of leeway to present themselves on the résumé in ways that highlight their strengths. A clear, concise résumé, especially one with a few unusual elements and a good focus, can really stand out among recent graduates. International experience may be just the difference the student’s résumé will need.

**Slide 16: Portfolio – cover letter**

Students can also include their international experience on cover letters that they send out with their résumé, especially when their experience is directly relevant to the position for which they’re applying. Students may not be familiar with job letters, so the facilitator may have to explain that a résumé is usually accompanied by a personal letter, about a page in length (although expectations vary by industry). Although some applicants do not take advantage of the opportunity, the job letter is one way that international experience can be inserted into the application process.

Job letters can be more tailored to the individual position that students are applying for than the résumé, so we highlight for them some letter-writing strategies that are relevant to international experience. The key in our presentation is to encourage students to shift away
from writing declarative sentences about themselves – ‘I am creative,’ ‘I am a good problem solver’ – to highlighting what they’ve learned, evidence of these character traits, and other more concrete accomplishments. For example, for a student interested in design: ‘When I was in France, I realised how important design was to communicating function because, so often, objects communicated their function – or did not – when I could not just recognise them from familiarity.’ Or, for a student in business administration: ‘Travelling overseas and working in culturally diverse teams has made me better understand that an important part of leadership is adapting communication to the people we work with, understanding their motivations, and tailoring our approach to problem solving.’ Job letters, like résumés, better persuade when they use examples and demonstrate ability, not bluntly assert that the candidate has a trait. To persuade a person that one works well in a team, for instance, the most effective way is to offer an example of good teamwork or write something that suggests the candidate actually understands the challenges of cooperation, not just baldly assert, ‘I work well in teams.’

Along with your résumé, most of the time that you submit an application, you will also submit a job letter. A job letter is a cover letter that goes with your résumé that introduces you, demonstrates your awareness of the opportunity, and generally – you hope – gets the reader intrigued to see your credentials. Whereas your résumé tends to be standardised; job letters, instead, can specifically talk about the firm or employer, how you see yourself fitting in, and your experience, tailored to the nature of the opening.

In some situations, you may NOT want to use your international experience, or use it less. For example, if the job specifically says that there is an overseas affiliate or clients, you definitely can bang the drum harder about international experience.

Especially if the job description lists desirable qualities in the applicant, try to use an example or two that illustrates a time when you’ve demonstrated those qualities. You don’t usually have to cover every desirable trait on the list, as long as you convince us that we can be confident in you as a candidate. When possible, instead of using a rhetoric of ‘I am…’, try to shift to talk about your experiences, what you’ve learned, or challenges you faced. As the example on the slide shows, if you can clearly articulate something you’ve learned and how it will apply to the
position that they are seeking to feel, a human resources officer is more likely to find your international experience an advantage in your application.

Slide 17: Portfolio – overview

This slide offers some general advice that comes up across many of the portfolio activities.

1 paragraph, 1 sentence, 1 word: Many people who work in the area of personal branding or seeking employment talk about preparing in advance a short synopsis of the candidate’s biography or philosophy. The task can be daunting for many new graduates as they feel they don’t have much to say; fortunately, not having much to say is less of a disadvantage when time is tight and impressions have to be made quickly. Although the idea that any person could be described in a single word may seem absurd, in fact, even the candidates for the Republican Party’s nomination for President in 2012 got asked in a debate in 2012 to describe themselves in a single word. So be ready for the question.

Although the exercise may seem simplistic, it can be helpful for students. Clarifying who they are, what makes them distinctive (as we’ll discuss below) is probably far more important than putting ‘what I seek’ or something else like that on their résumés.

Show, don’t tell (or avoiding adjectives)...: In general, showing or demonstrating a trait in one’s experience is more important than claiming it, as discussed in the previous two slides. Examples tend to trump self descriptions. A lot of the students’ intangible qualities will come through better from examples of them in action than from saying, ‘I’m ambitious. I’m determined. I’m hard-working.’

Differentiate...: One of the hardest things to deal with from the other side of the table is that applicants start to seem alike. Even if an applicant has something that doesn’t quite fit the job description, if it’s memorable, it may still be an advantage. One does not differentiate by conforming to expectations, as we discuss below.

Get ‘testimonials’: Testimonials are times when other people have clearly found you strong, effective, dependable. We tell students to think about times when they’ve been trusted, put in charge, promoted, assumed leadership -- these are ‘testimonials.’ Slip them into an interview or letter because they suggest that people who know the candidate well count on them or recognise their strengths.
‘Easy to read is hard to write.’: The point is to edit and polish, not to send in a first draft. Students think that they are 90% finished when they have a first draft; they’re probably closer to 50% finished.

The things that are easiest to read are NOT what you write most quickly. REREAD everything you will send in. Be formal, not informal -- it’s always okay to overshoot on politeness, but may be fatal to undershoot. Reduce, reduce, reduce – delete extraneous words. Often removing unnecessary or convoluted writing REALLY improves what you say. The harder you work at getting it right, the more effortlessly your readers will get through your work.

Slide 18: Portfolio – talking about self

Slide 18 presents some of the more obvious examples of questions that students may be asked about your study abroad experience in interviews. We usually stop for a few minutes and let students writer answers or notes on the three ‘Why?’ questions that appear on the slide (and on the worksheet). Of all the questions they might be asked about international exchange, these three are probably the core that they should feel comfortable discussing. If time does not permit giving students a few minutes to write some notes, the questions are on the worksheet so that they can remind themselves of these issues.

Exercise Five

**The ‘why?’ questions**

The bottom half of this slide contains a list of four of the competencies that students may be asked about in an interview that have direct relevance to study abroad and exchange. Point out to students that a single example may actually work well from several of these competency questions.

*For example, you might have an example of cross-cultural negotiation and communication that you can pull out to talk about working in teams, negotiation skills, group-work skills, or how you might deal with people unlike yourself. A story about flexibility or adaptation might also be a good story about problem-solving or resourcefulness or creative problem-solving. In other words, the exercise just gets you in the habit of accessing your memories as career stories.*
Imagine you take an elevator ride with someone in your field and he or she asks, ‘hey, I think we’re hiring. What’s your background?’ Or you’re at a conference and meet a potential mentor and this person says, ‘Tell me about yourself.’ What will you tell them?

The answer is the ‘elevator speech,’ a quick presentation of yourself that only lasts the time it takes to travel in the elevator -- about one paragraph, or a minute. Practising an ‘elevator speech’ is a great exercise just for you to clarify where to start. You can cut it short -- the one-sentence version -- or you can elaborate, but the elevator speech is your outline of key points.

Exercise Six

The ‘elevator speech’

The slide gives a basic structure for an ‘elevator speech,’ identifying the questions that a student needs to answer. The format is borrowed from a widely circulated exercise in personal branding, but it is adapted for the situation of many students, which often includes little prior experience to draw upon in their answers.

Some of the questions are straight-forward: the student needs to let the other person know who he or she is. The fourth question is difficult to answer except in context. So the worksheet asks the students to make notes for an answer on four of the six questions: 2) What do you want to do? 3) What’s your motivation? 5) Differentiation; and 6) Your hook, passion or mission. (The number sequence leaves out the two questions that either cannot be answered or are obvious.)

What do you want to do?: Many students do not have a clear sense of a career that they desire. In an ideal elevator speech, the student conveys that he or she wants to do a particular job rather than just collect the pay check and benefits. Employers want to give jobs to people who want those jobs badly, so the applicant should convey a clear sense that they want an occupation, an opportunity, and a career. Luke warm will not do.

What’s your motivation?: We are more likely to believe a person wants a position and will do well if we understand his or her motivation. What is it about the occupation that attracts the applicant? What does the student like to do? What is it about the industry or the position
that’s exciting? Has the student already had a taste of a particular profession and wants more? Expressing a passion helps the hearer believe that the student has sufficient motivation to overcome the challenges that will invariably lie ahead.

**Differentiation:** How is the applicant different? In a pile of eighty résumés, what makes the student’s stand out? Differentiation is an opportunity for students to say something about themselves that is distinctive, but it’s a bit of a tightrope: exceptional is great; odd is not. Does the student have a strong passion that is related to the occupation, or that demonstrates a trait that’s important, but in a different activity? Is the student an accomplished athlete, musician, artist, or writer? Has the student won an award? In our Prezi version of the talk, we discuss one of our students who was an accounting and business major, but also a passionate food blogger, almost an amateur restaurant critic. In a pile of accountants, his point of differentiation could be his passion for Asian cuisine and writing; at least he would be less likely to be forgotten when the interview was over. The one topic we would counsel avoiding, however, is stories of triumph over illness, tragedy or other personal problem; although these can be very powerful, they can leave an interviewer cold.

**Your hook, passion or mission:** Deciding on a final ‘hook’ can be a challenge, but it’s a last bit of information or thinking that ‘hooks’ the person hearing it, leaving them wanting to learn more. Some personal marketing literature talks about selling the applicant’s ‘mission,’ but this may be off-putting or too challenging for students about to graduate. Instead, ask students if there is something that they could say that might make the interviewer want to learn more. Is the student working on research and the results aren’t all in yet? Is there a major project in the works like an honours thesis or final screen-writing project? Is the student waiting to hear back about an article she has submitted to the university’s student magazine on exchange to the Czech Republic or Ireland?

The ‘hook’ shouldn’t be an artificial ‘cliff hanger’ – ‘Invite me back to the next round of interviews, and I’ll tell you my Big Secret… but only if you invite me back.’ Rather, the hook should be a natural extension of what the student is doing and hoping to achieve. This kind of open-ended discussion can give the interviewer a sense that the student is not just inert and waiting for something to happen. Don’t force it; if there’s nothing like this in a student’s repertoire, that’s okay. But tell them to think about how they can leave an open question or get someone wanting to know more. When the interviewer does follow up, there is already a question waiting to be asked in round two of the interviews.
Slide 20: Elevator speech 2

After students have had a chance to write their notes on their elevator speech, we make sure that they edit the work. In our experience, students are often reluctant to edit written work, seeing something that is written as done. Encourage them to refine and improve, especially by making the core structure as lean and concise as possible, cutting out all unnecessary parts. When presenting the ideas in an elevator speech, they will always be able to expand or extrapolate, if they know well their key points.

If possible, divide the workshop into small groups, probably of three or four, and let them talk to each other, to give the talks. Make sure to keep them on task as some may be reluctant to engage in the scenario, and the students who want to practise will be discouraged, even if only a minority appear to be reluctant to practise. Small group work requires that the instructor and most enthusiastic students have the energy and opportunity to overcome any group inertia or reservations.

The slide offers basic advice for refining and practising the ‘elevator speech’ so that the presentation works well across audiences. Remind them that some of the language that they may use in academic settings may not work well with other audiences; some of the people who interview them, for example, may be their parents’ or even grand-parents’ ages and may not be caught up on current technical language, specialised jargon or slang.

Slide 21: Career stories 2 – Cautions

These are our final warnings for students:

**Prepare in advance** – don’t mislead yourself that answers will be ‘better’ or ‘ fresher’ if you haven’t rehearsed. What’s more likely to happen if you don’t prepare is that you forget something important that is obvious as soon as you walk out of the interviewer’s door, or you start with an answer that you regret as soon as it’s half out of your mouth, or you’re simply caught flat-footed, unprepared for an obvious question.

Even though we think study abroad stories are great for professionalisation, however, two pitfalls are possible:
Don’t accentuate your own foreign-ness – job interviews are the place to show that you fit in, that you can wear your newfound cultural skills on the inside, if necessary. Don’t wear jewellery or clothing that is obviously from overseas; some interviewers might love it, but some will find it off-putting. One of the most important questions that the interviewer is asking him- or herself is, ‘How well will this candidate fit into our firm or workplace?’ If it turns out that your boss is a former globe-trotter with international credentials, you can demonstrate your multiculturalism later.

Follow your interviewer’s lead. Use one or two stories from study abroad; don’t answer every question by talking about your host country. If the interviewer asks, sure, tell them about it. You may run into an interviewer that is tired of talking about advertising or law or the hospitality industry after thirty or forty interviews, and they may want to swap stories about Copenhagen or their year on exchange in Quebec. Let the interviewer signal where the conversation should go.

Slides 22, 23 & 24: Closing slides & Credits

Although you are free to modify the slides, attribution is a condition of use. Please include contact and licensing information for the Bringing the Learning Home project with any modification or adaptation of the slides.
**Re-entry**

1. Placement specific expertise inventory.
2. Hard examples of soft skills
3. Cross-cultural skills
4. Your résumé, international experience included
5. The ‘why?’ questions
6. The ‘elevator speech’

Please see the notes on the exercises in the detailed presenter’s notes on the workshops above. A handout to facilitate this workshop, and the exercises, is available for download at ozstudentsabroad.com and http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/.
Suggested additional readings


Hachey’s book is, in the words of one reviewer, ‘monumental,’ and the resource is invaluable. The target audience is primarily North American, but so much of the work is useful that it makes a great investment, especially for students to use through their study abroad offices.


**Videos**

Videos of BTLH workshops run by team members and other presenters.

References


Cover photos by Sharyn (snow in Sweden; left) and Thomas Nolan (white party in Sweden; right); Sharyn's photo is available at http://tiny.cc/8w3lq.

Photo of camping by Simone Anderson at Glastonbury (after exams were completed!).

Photo of students touring by the Pyramids, Egypt, by Thomas Nolan.

Photo of shark float in street parade from Barcelona, Spain, by Greg Downey.

Photo of the sea with jetty near Aarhus, Denmark, by Emily Merrick.

Photo of her friend Gus on the beach at Clam Gulch, Alaska, by Lisa Redwood.

Bringing the Learning Home
ozstudentsabroad.com
http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/

Requests and inquiries concerning rights should be addressed to:

Australian Government
Office for Learning and Teaching
Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
GPO Box 9880, Location code N255EL10
Sydney NSW 2001
Australia
learningandteaching@deewr.gov.au