Welcome home

Re-entry workshop

Monday, 27 February 2012
We recommend removing extraneous slides if this part of the module is embedded in a larger re-entry workshop. Too many slides, and too much text on the slides, can reinforce passive attitudes. The more active, engaged and responsive the students, the better they will find the workshop.

Many of these slides echo points made in the pre-departure portion of this module. We believe that this prefiguring and reinforcement are critical for maximum effect.
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Students may be thinking that their study abroad experience is over. True, they’ve come through customs.

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

Professional development isn’t just about getting a job: we hope to encourage you to see new opportunities, to get the best possible position, to be better able to secure graduate school admission, grants or scholarships, or promotions....
So 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 study abroad student.’ So how does your study abroad experience fit into what most employers want?

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?
What do employers want from you?

Placement-specific expertise
‘Soft skills’ & personal traits.
Developing ‘career stories.’
Cross-cultural skills.
Building your portfolio.

This is the summary slide -- each one is unpacked later (so this crowded).

1. Placement-specific expertise: having to do with the specific university or site that the student visited (language, country expertise, internship, strength in a particular academic program at host institution).
2. General skills developed by traveling to another culture such as strategies for communicating, interpreting difference, recognising their own Australianness or home culture orientation.
3. General personality traits demonstrated and even reinforced by study abroad (adaptability, independence, resourcefulness).
4. Career stories are specific, concrete examples of the previous two (general skills and traits) in action. Good career stories provide evidence of hard-to-show abilities.
5. Portfolio building is the idea that, with reflection and preparation, study abroad generates concrete and lasting elements that can go into one’s portfolio in a way that the average semester does not.
Emphasise that choosing to study abroad 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.

‘Employers’ may not realise...’: The point is that employers will not simply be impressed by the fact of studying abroad. Putting, ‘I studied abroad in the UK,’ on your résumé will not really be persuasive.

What WILL be persuasive is what the students have done. You’ve lived alone, managed a budget, learned a completely new 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.

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, etc.
Placement specific expertise

Courses (unavailable in Australia?).
Professional experience (internship).
Language skills.
Destination-specific expertise.
Cohort-specific expertise (peers).

Top three are the MOST OBVIOUS and the ones that need to be emphasised in pre-departure as they are not possible to retro-fit to a finished placement.

1&2: Remind students that they may have courses or work experience that is unavailable in Australia. Make sure to emphasise this. 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 here, or seen firsthand the way urban planning in Europe accommodates bicycle commuters, these experiences need to be featured.

3: 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!

4: IMPORTANT FOR FACILITATOR: Remind students that, for this goal, the exchange is NOT OVER! Make yourself an expert in the country you 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 reader from your host, 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. As we put it in the pre-departure talk: ‘Of course I can figure out software licensing. I figured out Japan! (or Norway, or the US...)’

The other thing is that they can 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 than that in Australia. In other words, consider how to continue building international expertise in an area that is interesting to the student.

5. Cohort-specific: 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, but includes other international students.
The National Association of Colleges and Employers (USA) asked employers, if applicants have the same qualifications, what are the most important skills or traits? These are their top five.

Four of these [click] are arguably demonstrated well in study-abroad experiences:

- 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 more 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 analyze the situation you're in now
- and you definitely demonstrated initiative by simply choosing to go outside your comfort zone.

REMEMBER: THESE ARE ALL RANKED HIGHER THAN GPA AND QUALITY OF UNIVERSITY THAT THE STUDENT ATTENDED even in the very competitive and status-conscious US job market.
The National Association of Colleges and Employers (USA) asked employers, if applicants have the same qualifications, what are the most important skills or traits? These are their top responses from 6-10.

Arguably, some of these are even more readily demonstrated in study abroad (three or even four) computer skills are the one that is probably least, but if you’ve been blogging or communicating electronically, perhaps:

- your stories of obstacles can be transformed into stories of problem-solving, after all, you did find a way (or figured out when certain options just couldn’t be pursued)...
- you’ve been writing and communicating in writing (and may even be a published writer as we go)...
- 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 humor, negotiation...)
- and probably most clearly of all, you’ve demonstrated a greater degree of flexibility and adaptability than your peers.

REMEMBER: THESE ARE ALL RANKED HIGHER THAN GPA AND QUALITY OF UNIVERSITY THAT THE STUDENT ATTENDED even in the very competitive and status-conscious US job market.

worksheet exercise
Use the first Professionalization Re-entry workshop worksheet.

Don’t make them sound like ‘soft skills’: let the principles guide your account of your accomplishments. In other words, SHOW, don’t tell.

Show how you were adaptive, don’t say, ‘I am adaptable.’
Prepare in advance.
Focus on success & learning.
De-emphasise frustrations, failures or bizarre.
Concrete examples!

Prepare in advance -- a bit of rehearsal will not make you seem overly well-rehearsed. Eliminates likelihood of freezing or being unable to answer basic questions.

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 for 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.’
Cross-cultural skills

‘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’

Cultural skills can be portable; they are not necessarily culturally specific, if you can think about them generally. We might call them ‘meta-skills’ or ‘cross-cultural skills’ in that you’ve learned 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’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 in interacting with others.
Cross-cultural skills

- Deal creatively with ambiguity & change.
- Interacting comfortably with different values & perspectives.
- Better at learning from experiences.
- Applying information in new or broader contexts.
- Identifying new problems & alternatives.
- Take moderate risks & confront unfamiliar situations.
- Act diplomatically & build relations—in real & virtual worlds.


Experts in the field of study abroad and human resources identify these sorts of skills as some of the particular strengths gained or demonstrated in study abroad.
How to talk about your experience...

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.

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...

You don’t want to just repeat buzzwords or to sound so tailored to each offering that you appear to be a completely blank slate.
The enemy of a good portfolio is being forgotten, unmemorable, faceless or overly vague.
How to talk about your experience...

**EDUCATION**

**Bachelor of Communication & Media Studies**, Murdoch University (Expected completion Nov 2011)
Concentrations in Journalism and Screen Production

**INTERNATIONAL and CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE**

**Danish School of Media and Journalism**, Denmark

**Photojournalism**

- Conducted research into visual story telling using new media technologies.
- Compiled a report for presentation to industry picture agency “SCANPIX.”
- Presented a seminar on “Women in the Media” events conducted in Western Australia to Danish academics and students.

  *Additional skills acquired: Digital magazine production*

  Designed a PowerPoint presentation in Danish

  Industry liaison and business development

  Cross-cultural communication skills

**worksheet**

Example by Alexandra Haaxman, Murdoch University
How to talk about your experience...

Provide an opening statement that introduces your experience.

Mention the name of the program where you studied.

Clearly articulate what you learned from the experience and how this will help you in the position you are applying for.

Collectively, my course work, overseas study experience and employment within the hospitality sector have prepared me well for the position of (role) with (name of company).

While enrolled in the Danish School of Media and Journalism, I utilised social media technologies such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn for research purposes. This gave me the insight to use this technology strategically, together with a deeper understanding as to how such technologies work within a European culture as opposed to the Australian context. Accordingly, I can demonstrate how to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations. As your organisation embraces online technology and attracts international subscribers, my knowledge and competencies can be practically applied....

Example by Alexandra Semmens, Murdoch University

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Job letters can be more tailored to the individual position that you’re applying for. Résumé is more standardised; job letter can specifically talk about the firm, how you see yourself fitting, and you can tailor your experience.

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.
How to talk about yourself...

- 1 paragraph, 1 sentence, 1 word
- Show, don’t tell (or avoiding adjectives)...
- Differentiate...
- Get ‘testimonials’...
- ‘Easy to read is hard to write.’

Ahead of time, think about the one paragraph, one sentence, and even one word version of who you are. You may get asked for them, or you may have to go to these on very short notice -- for example, the elevator version of who you are. Probably more important than putting ‘what I seek’ or something else like that on a résumé. [In general, advise against putting too elaborate a discussion of what you’re after on the résumé -- you’re after a job. Too much discussion about what you want can make you come across as demanding, less interested in earning things and proving yourself.]

Show, don’t tell -- better to talk about what you have done than to describe yourself using only adjectives. A lot of your intangible qualities will come through better from examples of you in action than from you saying, ‘I’m ambitious. I’m determined. I’m hard-working.’

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.

Testimonials are times when other people have clearly found you strong, effective, dependable. Think about times when you’ve been trusted, put in charge, promoted, assumed leadership -- these are ‘testimonials.’ Slip them in because they suggest that people who know you well turn to you.

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. Often removing extraneous 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.
How to talk about yourself...

Reflect on the “why” questions.

- Why did you choose to study abroad?
- Why & how did you choose your study location?
- What do you think you got out of your study abroad experience?

Illustrate competencies employers seek with examples:

- Creatively solve problems, apply familiar concepts in unfamiliar situations.
- Contribute to an ethnically diverse team.
- Take personal risks & act independently.
- Be flexible & adapt to rapidly changing situations.

These are a couple of the more obvious examples of questions you may be asked about your study abroad experience. Just think about them or write notes so that you’re not caught completely unaware.

The illustrate competencies are some of the sorts of topics you may be asked to talk about that often can be answered with experiences from study abroad. Often times a story can be used for several different purposes, so even if you haven’t prepared for the specific question you’ve been asked, you can still use the story to illustrate the quality.

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.’

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.
How to talk about yourself...

Refining your talk
- Cut out long words, jargon...
- Strip out unnecessary parts.
- 90-100 words.
- Practice!

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 practice will be discouraged, even if only a minority appear to be reluctant to practice. Small group work requires that the instructor and most enthusiastic students have the energy and opportunity to overcome any group inertia or reservations.
Prepare in advance - talk these out.

Don’t accentuate your own foreign-ness!
Don’t make your whole interview about study abroad.

Even though we think study abroad stories are great for professionalisation, however, two pitfalls are possible:

1) 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 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 to be an outpost of the UN in this office, you can demonstrate your multi-culturalism later.

2) 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.
Thank you!

Re-entry workshop
Professionalisation

re-entry workshop

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