Internationalizing your Resume & Interview

If you have studied or traveled abroad or have knowledge of a foreign language, your resume needs to reflect your expertise. Why? Because employers are looking for you. They're looking for potential employees who have knowledge beyond the culture and borders of the U.S. They're looking for candidates with an appreciation of and an ability to thrive in foreign environments. They want employees who can communicate across culture boundaries.

Study Abroad

Bring your study abroad experience to the top of your resume instead of burying it somewhere in the category of 'other' or 'extracurricular.' It's not other. It's education. That's where you put it:

Education	
BA in Economics, Murray State University	2008
University of Sunderland, England, exchange program	2006 fall semester

This brings your study abroad to the top. Employers see right away that you have spent structured, quality time outside the country, that you have drive and initiative and that the unknowns won't scare you away. Listing this at the top helps you get the interview.

AVOID: In the interview avoid talking about your massive weekend travel schedule, how much beer you drank, how fun your 'trip' was, and how much money you spent. Instead focus on the content of your courses, the way they were taught and how that lent itself to your learning, the challenges of the teaching style on your program, and how the international environment was invaluable in your course learning. You can also deal with the challenge of culture shock and how your adjustment period was. Be honest about any personal challenges you faced as you assimilated into the new culture and what you learned about yourself through that experience.

Foreign Language

The knowledge of a foreign language can also be highlighted. If you are fluent, you can put this language in the *Education* category as well. If you have basic knowledge or intermediate knowledge, put this in a category with other special skills, but list it at the top. If you are fluent in several languages, then you need to create a *Language* section on your resume to reflect this and address your level in each one.

AVOID: Never list your language level higher than you actually are. You never know who will be interviewing you – they just might start speaking to you in that language and if you can't respond you've lost the job.

International Volunteer Work, Travel, and Professional Development

There are several types of international travel we could be talking about: vacations, volunteer work, or professional development such as conference presentations or musical performances. Here's what is recommended for each:

- **Vacation.** As an employer, I don't want to see that you went to Cancun with your buddies. What I would like to know, however, is that you own a passport. In this case list in another category that you have international travel experience and a valid passport.

- **Volunteer Work.** This is often very laborious and life-changing work. If so, it needs to be given some space on your resume as *International Volunteer Work*. This could appear under the *Education* category if it related to your major field. It could be listed under *Professional Development* if it resulted in a change in philosophy or related sincerely to your personal professional development, including the educational path you chose to take. Finally, it could appear under *Professional Experience* if it relates to the type of job you are seeking.

- **Professional Development or Musical Performance.** This includes any international conferences at which you have been a session presenter, choral or instrumental performances you were involved in either as a group or invited to participate in solo, or other relevant international professional experience. List this type of experience in the *Professional Experience* category (your work experience) or a *Professional Development* category if you have other things you can list there as well.

AVOID: Don't list the vacation hot spots (Cancun is not the real Mexico) you've jetted off to with mom and dad or your college pals over spring break. Listing passport ownership and international travel is sufficient for this. If your volunteer work wasn't productive or structured, again list it only as international travel experience. You want to avoid getting into specifics about a program that you weren't proud of.

If you are asked about your international travel experience, you can answer quickly with a now personal knowledge of passport control and customs and a great vacation in Mexico with friends. Leave it at that.