



Marketing your AIFS Experience Professionally

Katherine Greiner, M.A.

Alumni Relations Coordinator, AIFS Study Abroad
alumni@aifs.com

Angela Manginelli, M.A.

Director, Alumni and Diversity Initiatives, AIFS Study Abroad
alumni@aifs.com

In Your Resume

Resume styles vary greatly by industry; a graphic design student will have a resume that is almost unrecognizable to a biology student, and vice versa. It is a means of showcasing your skills and experience, and should be designed as such. The examples below reflect a standard template style, however there is no 'correct' style – if it is readable, the information is presented in a way that makes sense, and it reflects your best abilities, it is doing its job. Keep in mind that the average person will spend only six seconds scanning your resume, so you want to make those seconds count!

Whether you studied abroad during your January break or spent a year in a country, this experience is something that sets you apart and should be included. How you will do so requires a bit more thought, but here are three common places to include this information in your resume.

1. Education section

There are two common ways of highlighting study abroad as a part of your educational history. The first is to include it as an educational experience which contributed to your undergraduate degree. You should include it here if the position you are applying for is not directly related to your time abroad or to your language skills and you are using skills gained from other experiences to back your application.

Education & Qualifications

**Aug 2014 – May 2018
(Expected)**

University of Rhode Island (Kingston, RI)

BA International Studies, French minor

Summer study abroad program in Grenoble, France (5/29/17 – 6/28/17)

Courses included: [insert relevant course titles from your degree here] Senior

Thesis: [if applicable, insert title here]

The second is to highlight it as an academic achievement of its own. This is preferable if you studied abroad for an unusually long period, went to an atypical destination, or simply if you want to reference specific classes you took while abroad, or language skills you gained through this experience.

Education & Qualifications

**Aug 2014 – May 2018
(Expected)**

University of Rhode Island (Kingston, RI)

BA International Studies, French minor

Courses included: [insert relevant course titles from your degree here] Senior

Thesis: [if applicable, insert title here]

2017 (May 29 – June 28)

Université de Grenoble (Grenoble, FR)

Summer session at the Centre Universitaire d'Études Françaises

Intensive French language study

2. 'International Experience' section

If the position you are applying for warrants specific reference to your experience abroad or language skills, or if you are using the skills gained from this experience to back your application, consider creating a specific section to highlight your international experience(s).

International Experience

2017 (Jan-May)	Academic semester in Prague, CZ while completing my BS in Communications Courses included: <i>[insert relevant course titles from your time abroad here]</i> Skills gained: Adaptability, resilience, cross-cultural communication, Czech language proficiency, self-reliance, independence
Additional	Vacation travel while living abroad and with family: personally organized and led a three-week tour of Italy for a large family group Skills gained: Resourcefulness, time management, leadership, ability to handle stress

This section is particularly useful if you studied in an atypical location or on a program particularly relevant to your major, as it will allow you to go into much further detail about your accomplishments and skills gained than is possible in the first example layout.

International Experience

2017 (June-July)	8-week term in Istanbul, Turkey while completing my BA in Politics Courses completed: Religion and Society History of the Modern Middle East Comparative & International Politics of the Middle East Skills gained: Intercultural communication, religious sensitivity, cultural awareness
------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

For students who had an internship or did volunteer work while abroad, there is a third option:

3. Experience section

Internships and volunteer work should be counted alongside your other work experience, and formatted in the same way as any additional jobs you include on your resume.

Relevant Experience

2017 (Sept – Dec) London, UK	Solace Women’s Aid Internship in Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provided office assistance for women’s domestic violence charity• Drafted press releases to promote new services• Assisted in the creation of a new multi-platform promotional campaign
----------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

We encourage you to create a resume master list: a single document where you keep full details of all your jobs, internships, and education, including dates, duties, specific skills learned, salaries if applicable, and contact information. It becomes increasingly difficult to remember these details as you gain experience. This will make it easier to quickly pull together a tailored resume when needed, since everything you need will be in one place.

A resume is not static; it should constantly change slightly, tailored to every job you apply for, and each new relevant experience you have should be added. You may find yourself combining or cycling through the different types of study abroad incorporation highlighted above, and you probably should. There is no such thing as a one-job-fits-all resume.

In a Cover Letter

There is a bit more leeway with cover letters than resumes; you are encouraged to explain your motivations and your goals, and you are often less restricted in terms of format or length. It can be intimidating to include non-traditional experience in professional writing, particularly for students who attended a short-term program. Even semester or year students face the 'extended vacation' view of study abroad when they return; your cover letter can show that it was more than that by highlighting the skills you gained through your experience or the ways in which your time abroad changed you. Make it work for you! The purpose of a cover letter is to get you an interview – it should be engaging, so they want to learn more.

The cover letter is your opportunity to explain why you are interested in the job or graduate program:

In January 2013, I took advantage of the opportunity to spend my winter break pursuing my dream of going to Latin America and spent three weeks living with a family in Costa Rica. While there I took a class on Human Rights, despite it being seemingly unrelated to my International Business major. However, after learning about Latin American labor rights and seeing the impacts of large international businesses on local economies through my host family's eyes, I was inspired to alter my course of study to focus on international business ethics. I plan to pursue this topic further, and your department's program in international business law would provide me with the knowledge and skills needed to effect meaningful change in this arena.

It is also your chance to explain why they should be interested in you, whether the position you are aiming for relates directly to your experience at first glance:

While my language skills began developing with my undergraduate French studies, my translation abilities were particularly enhanced through spending 11 weeks in Paris last summer. While there I took part in an intensive French curriculum with a heavy emphasis on phonetics. These classes, combined with my experience living with a French host family who spoke no English and enjoyed discussing politics over dinner, ensured my proficiency in conveying complex information and ideas such as those which could be expected in this position.

Or not:

In the spring of last year, I studied abroad in St. Petersburg, Russia. During this time, I took classes on art, history, culture, and Russian language, however the real education I received was outside of the classroom. Spending an extended period in a culture so different from my own provided me with an invaluable course on myself, my own culture, and how to communicate within, through, and outside of that cultural context. This change in perspective was the push I needed to be able to honestly evaluate the news media in the US and in other countries, and to explore how perspective plays a vital role in how news is portrayed throughout the world. I am eager to put this new perspective, as well as my awareness of media bias and personal commitment to neutrality, to use for your newspaper.

In an Interview

Similarly to a cover letter, an interview is a chance to use your experience abroad as an example to showcase your skills and abilities. It is also a chance to demonstrate why the person interviewing you should care – be sure to tie your story back to the specific job and company, or in the case of a grad school interview, the program and university.

Many recruiters recommend the ‘STAR’ technique for responding to interview questions in a concise, engaging way:

- S:** The **situation** in which the experience happened
- T:** The **task** related to the skill
- A:** The **action(s)** you took to complete the task
- R:** The **result** of the actions taken

When relating stories from your study abroad experience, this is an excellent place to start. There are many questions an interviewer may ask, but here are a couple common examples:

Have you been in a situation where you didn't have enough work to do?

Studying abroad can be difficult due to the amount of downtime compared to a traditional academic setting. If that was a challenge for you, how did you cope? What action did you take to fill that time? Perhaps you created a study abroad bucket list of things you wanted to do before you left, or you found a volunteer opportunity in the community. Alternatively, maybe you embraced the lifestyle and found yourself a different person now that you had a different work/life balance.

- S:** When I studied abroad in Paris for a summer as part of my Education degree, I found that after my morning language classes I had quite a lot of free time. I typically work in the summer, so having so much time to spare was difficult, even in a city like Paris where there’s so much to see.
- T:** I had to come up with something useful to do or I would feel like I’d wasted my time.
- A:** I spoke to my professors and my host mother about it, and we came up with a list of things I’d like to do. Ultimately, we decided on tutoring, and I discovered that a friend of my host mother had a child who was studying English.
- R:** We met and we got along very well, and so for the rest of my time in Paris, I spent two afternoons each week tutoring Simone. Another two afternoons were spent on lesson plans and grading in addition to my own homework, and I still had Friday afternoons free so I could travel.

Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.

If the goal was studying abroad, think of the barriers you overcame; maybe you had to sell the idea to your parents, or fundraise to pay for the program yourself, or figure out how to fit in your goal of going abroad with a rigorous academic plan.

- S:** I knew before I left high school that I wanted to study abroad in college. My parents had never left the country, but I knew I wanted to see the world. I decided on Australia, with the thought that if I'm going to go, I might as well go as far as I can! Unfortunately, studying abroad is difficult with a major like nursing, since the requirements are so strict.
- T:** I had to convince my course director, who didn't think I could graduate on time, and my parents, who weren't at all sure it was a good idea for me to leave home, that it was worth it.
- A:** I created a detailed educational plan for myself, which I brought to my course director to show her that it was possible to complete my degree on time and still study abroad for a full semester. I brought that, along with extensive research on the university, the city, and the program provider, to my parents. I looked up all the details on funding, and got a scholarship to make it even easier to convince them. I knew that I could only achieve this goal if I went in fully armed with the facts.
- R:** My work paid off. I spent a semester in Perth, where in addition to my required nursing class and a public health elective, I took a class on working with indigenous families, which has in turn fueled my desire to work in public health, specifically with underserved and marginalized communities.

It is a good idea to have a few pre-prepared stories when you go into the interview, as many of them can be adapted to fit several questions that may come up. Keep in mind that not all your stories need to involve your time abroad. While you gained valuable skills and experience on this trip, no matter how long, be sure to also consider the following experiences:

- Summer or part-time jobs
- Internships
- Volunteer experience
- Athletics
- Musical training
- Clubs
- ??? (You know your experience – if you feel like you learned something important, include it!)

Practice Makes Perfect

As I'm sure you can tell, the STAR method is useful not just for interviews, but can be used for your personal statements, cover letters, and your elevator pitch as well!

Take some time to come up with a few stories of your own. Remember that not all your stories need to involve your time abroad, think about everything else you've done too.