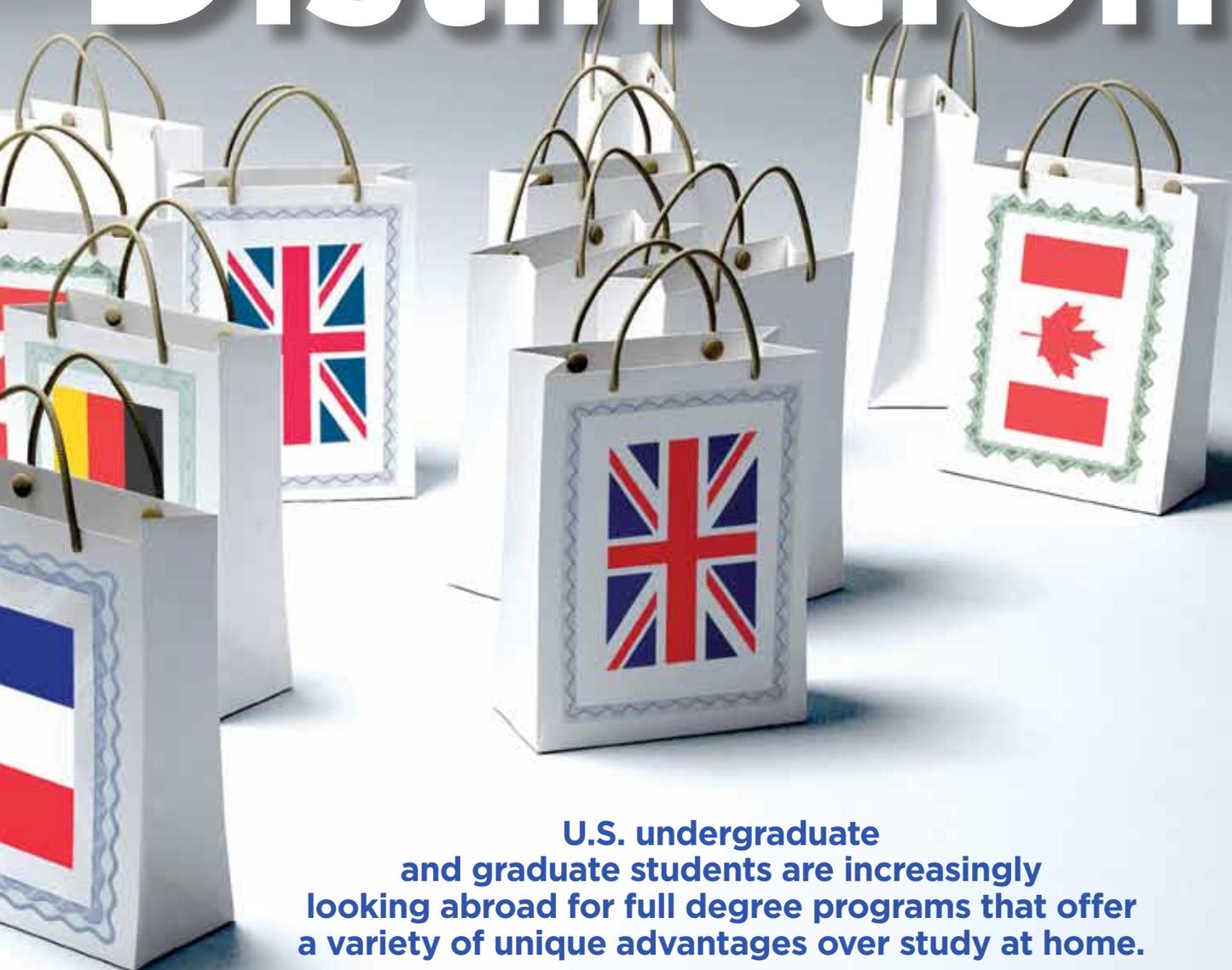


Degrees *of*



Distinction



U.S. undergraduate and graduate students are increasingly looking abroad for full degree programs that offer a variety of unique advantages over study at home.

BY CHARLOTTE WEST

THE COMPETITION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IS FIERCE and now students from the United States may be up for grabs as well. U.S. students are increasingly looking beyond the nation's borders for higher education. In addition to the growing number of students participating in shorter term education abroad, more students are also considering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs in foreign countries. Of the more than 312,000 American postsecondary students studying abroad, more than 42,000 are enrolled in full degree programs, according to a new study from the Institute of International Education (IIE). There are many reasons students chose to pursue a degree program abroad—including time and cost effectiveness, personal connections, previous study abroad experience, and highly focused degree programs—but many students and educators also point to the necessity of global competence in today's job market.

Keenan Linsly, who recently transferred to Aarhus University in Denmark after completing his first two years at a community college in Virginia, believes his Danish degree will differentiate him from the competition. “I definitely think a foreign degree will separate me from the pack—especially if I decide to return to the U.S.,” he says.

Nripendra Khatrichettri, an American who completed her master’s degree in international studies at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia, in July 2011, confirms that many students are seeking “something different.”

“I decided to complete my graduate degree overseas because, personally, I believe ‘where’ you learn is equally as important as ‘what’ and ‘how’ you learn,” she says.

However, Khatrichettri admits her decision was based more on the individual master’s program than it was on the country itself. “My connection to Australia was not as strong or deep. I was more attracted to my master’s program there than anything else,” she says.

Many in the field higher education agree that international experience can make a candidate stand out. “From the perspective of employers, (degrees from abroad) really do make American students competitive because more and more employers are looking at a prospective employee’s resume to see what kind of international experiences they have had,” says Rajika Bhandari, IIE deputy vice president of research and evaluation.

Bhandari is the author of the new IIE report, *U.S. Students in Overseas Degree Programs: Key Destinations and Fields of Study*, published in January 2012. The report is the first attempt to track the number of U.S. students obtaining full degrees. The data was collected through Project Atlas, which is the global equivalent of *Open Doors*, with partners that all represent a national-level agency tracking student mobility.

The data revealed that more than 42,000 U.S. students are enrolled in academic degree programs in the 13 countries represented in the study. A majority of students are enrolled at the postgraduate level, 44 percent in master’s programs, and 17 percent in doctoral programs. Nevertheless, there are still approximately 11,000 (39 percent) undergraduates pursuing their degree abroad.

Bhandari believes this will have a positive impact on U.S. student mobility. “This is a good thing for the U.S. If we add together the *Open Doors* study abroad numbers and with this new estimate of 42,000 students obtaining full degrees, it adds up to a total of 312,000 students who are obtaining some kind of overseas study experience. That makes it much more comparable to the mobility data we have for other countries,” she says.

Bhandari stresses that the report is the first time that data for full-degree students has been tracked, it’s difficult to predict if this is actually a growing trend.

IIE reports that an overwhelming majority—nearly three-fourths—of degree-seeking U.S. students are pursuing their education in Anglophone countries. Of the countries participating in this study, the United Kingdom and Canada are the top two destinations for American students, with Australia in fifth place behind Germany and France. Europe is also the top region among Americans outside of the Anglophone countries, with countries like the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark offering increasing numbers of full-degree programs in English. While the IIE report didn’t track the language of instruction, Bhandari believes there is a correlation between the growth of English-language master’s programs and the number of Americans pursuing full degrees abroad.

“From the perspective of employers, (degrees from abroad) really do make American students competitive because more and more employers are looking at a prospective employee’s resume to see what kind of international experiences they have had.”

The UK as the Top Destination

In 2009–2010, 15,060 U.S. students pursued university study in the UK, according to the British Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). By level of study, 9,135 (60.7 percent) American students pursued full postgraduate degrees in the UK, alongside 5,925 (39.3 percent) Americans at the undergraduate level. This is in addition to short-term exchange, with more than 31,000 Americans completing a summer, semester, or year-long program at British universities (IIE *Open Doors* report, 2010). The most popular subjects for Americans pursuing master’s degrees in the UK included business/management and social sciences, as well law, design studies, media studies, and education.

The major selling points of British education include cost of attendance, shorter degrees, the portability of U.S. loans, and the reputation of the British higher education system,

particularly for institutions with well-recognized brands, such as Oxford, Cambridge, and the London School of Economics (LSE).

British master's degrees are often one-year programs, compared to two years at a U.S. institution making them more affordable. There are also more funding opportunities for taught master's degrees, in addition to readily available PhD stipends in research-intensive fields such as the sciences and engineering.

"The two key things are cost and time, but there are also practical factors in the decisionmaking process such as quality assurance and specialization in a particular subject area. When you look at one year of a master's as opposed to two and the ability to work in the UK for a year, those factors come into play," says Richard Everitt, deputy director of the British Council USA.

Anne Brooks, an American who earned a master of environmental policy, planning and regulation from the LSE in 2003, confirms that statement. She concluded that a one-year master's in the UK would be more cost-effective than a U.S. university due to living expenses and lost wages. "Even with full scholarships from U.S. universities, I figured out that LSE would end up costing me less. So the decision to attend university in the United Kingdom was a win-win-win: I earned a prestigious degree, had a chance to live abroad, and saved money in the end."

Others have similar stories. In 2005–2006, Ann-Marie Bruner-Tracey was a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar to Cardiff University in Wales, where she earned an MA in applied linguistics. She made the decision to go to England for her master's degree after spending seven years working as an admissions officer and recruiter at her undergraduate institution, Centenary College of Louisiana.

"During college in the U.S., it was not possible for me to study abroad, although that was always on the top of my dreams list," she

says. "I decided to think outside the box and see if my knowledge gained from advising undergraduates about options abroad might not also help me help myself! Since by this point, I was over 30, the idea of spending two years completing a master's program in the U.S. was less appealing than the same (and equally recognized) qualification in 12 months, especially as I planned to continue with my career following the 'break.'"

While the majority of Americans pursuing degrees in the UK are in masters and PhD programs, enrollment in British undergraduate programs is still a significant piece of the overall pie. According to Mary-Catherine Scarborough, a consultant with the British Council, the decisionmaking process is different for undergraduates than it is for graduate students. For masters and PhD programs, motivations include previous undergraduate study abroad experience, or as Bruner-Tracey mentions above, a desire for an international experience that was missed out on during undergraduate education.

"At the undergraduate level, (studying in another country) is brand new. Students might have had a study abroad experience in high school, but it is unlikely to have been in the UK," she says.

Scarborough says there has been an incremental increase in enrollment figures every year. She attributes much of the growth to recent developments in social media, which adds a new dimension to the traditional "word-of-mouth." "We think the solid increase is due in a large way to the growth of Facebook. The media capability for students to post pictures and stories in regular, everyday communication with friends and family from home has really helped because current high school students can see other students who have graduated and gone to university in the UK. They can see those everyday experiences and compare those to their counterparts who have stayed in the U.S.," she explains.

One of the most popular institutions for undergraduate study is St. Andrews in Scotland, though it attracts a number of postgraduates as well. In 2011–2012, there were 908 full-degree undergraduate students from the United States, as well as 100 doing postgraduate research and 98 doing postgraduate coursework. St. Andrew's total student population is around 6,000 undergraduates and 1,500 postgraduates.

While shorter programs are often a selling point at the postgraduate level, Scotland's four-year model is popular among many American students because it matches up with the standard U.S. bachelor's degree. The rest of the UK—England, Wales, and Northern Ireland—have three-year bachelor's degrees.

According to Yvonne Watt, director of international admissions, the United States is the largest international market for St. Andrews and one that has grown year on year over the last 10 years.

"In Scotland the undergraduate degree is four years and sits midway between the English and the U.S. system. Students are admitted into a faculty (usually arts or sciences) where they select three subjects in their first year. They decide on their honors (or major/s) at the end of their second year, which they then study in depth for the remaining two years. It enables the students to have both the flexibility of studying different subject areas as well a great depth of study," she explains.



An International Experience Close to Home

Following the UK, Canada is the second most popular destination for U.S. students seeking full degrees abroad. According to the Embassy of Canada, approximately 10,000 Americans are currently seeking undergraduate or graduate degrees at Canadian universities. Of these, it is estimated that approximately 5,000 Americans are currently enrolled in undergraduate programs in Canada. The total number has grown significantly over the last decade, with only about 2,000 Americans pursuing their education in Canada in 2001–2002.

Canada sees the United States as a major market for recruitment. The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs has identified the United States as one of eight major markets for international education promotion.

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The University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, British Columbia, is one of the most popular choices for U.S. students, alongside other institutions such as McGill and University of Toronto. UBC currently has approximately 1,400 undergraduate students from the United States. On the UBC campus in Vancouver, Americans make up about 15 percent of the total student population. As of November 2011, there were also 615 U.S. graduate students, 352 in masters programs and 261 in PhD programs. China and the United States are the two largest sources of international students at UBC.

The quality of education in Canada differs less between institutions than it does in the United States as almost all universities are public and regulated by provincial standards. Costwise, Canadian universities can also compete with and often beat out their U.S. counterparts as tuition ranges between \$8,000 and \$26,000, which is equivalent to out-of-state tuition at public universities in the United States and

less expensive than many private institutions. In addition, most Canadian institutions accept U.S. student loans, and graduates from Canadian universities are allowed to stay in Canada and work for up to three years.

“Public universities in Canada are not seeing the same level of cuts as they are in Washington and California. We’re seeing a lot of parents from California, for instance, who are looking to UBC because they know students are going to be able to get into the courses they need,” says Aaron Andersen, manager of international recruitment at the undergraduate level.

Minnesota has had a tuition reciprocity agreement with Manitoba, Canada, for more than 20 years. Not many students have been aware of the option, but that is changing—Manitoba is now promoting the opportunity, as reported by Minnesota Public Radio as recently as January. Tuition in Manitoba is cheaper than Minnesota state universities and with the reciprocity arrangement U.S. students can use federal student loans (but not Pell Grants) to pay for their tuition in Manitoba. Furthermore, in exchange for working after graduation in Canada for a period of time, Manitoba offers U.S. students \$25,000 in tax breaks to help pay their school debt.

Many of the students who chose to study in Canada have a previous personal connection to the country. Of the 1,400 American undergraduates at UBC, for instance, about a third have dual citizenship. “Oftentimes those students may have never even lived in Canada, but they have a parent who has Canadian citizenship,” says Andersen.

Students may also have friends or family who previously studied in Canada. Jack Hind Smith, who graduated from UBC in 2010 with a BA in international relations and human geography, says his parents obtained their master’s degrees in Canada in the 1970s.

“As a senior in high school, I considered university options in Canada because I wanted to ‘think out of the box’ and have a truly international experience. I am originally from the small city of Portland, Maine, and though it was a great place to grow up, I desperately wanted to escape and experience a broader world. I was familiar with many of the country’s well-regarded, research-intensive universities. UBC and McGill appealed to me because of their cosmopolitan surroundings and huge international student populations. In the end, it was UBC that won out with its spectacular setting and dynamic Pacific Rim location,” Smith explains.

Many students, like Smith, are attracted to the idea of an international experience close to home. As Andersen puts it, “It’s close to home, but it’s in another country. You might as well get the benefit of the global outlook.”

At the graduate level, U.S. students often chose Canada because it offers competitive postgraduate funding and lower tuition. Anne Bjorkman chose UBC for her master’s in botany and a PhD in geography, which she began in 2009. Affordabil-

The Value *of a* UK Degree

IN 2011, the British Council commissioned Ipsos Public Affairs to do an online survey of 411 employers in the United States and 436 in Canada on their perceptions of UK degrees. According to the survey, soft skills—such as communication, self-motivation, teamwork, time management, and creativity—matter most to employers in their evaluations of potential employees. For both the undergraduate and graduate levels, employers are looking for degrees that are relevant to the industry in question, specialized in the relevant subject areas, that foster critical thinking and writing skills, and that give professional/industry experience.

A vast majority of the employers (73 percent) in the United States consider degrees earned in the UK to be the same as or better than those earned in the United States. According to the survey, employers look for candidates who are well-rounded, with a relevant degree from a reputable university or program, and they

perceive these things to be generally characteristic of Americans who have studied at British universities. The employers also cited skills such as an “international perspective” and “cross-cultural understanding” as some of the benefits of earning a degree in the UK.

“The skills employers are looking for have changed. They are looking not only for the technical skills, but also things like intercultural navigation skills, team work, independent learning, innovation, and problem solving. These come out very strongly from students who have demonstrated they were able to study somewhere else,” says Richard Everitt, deputy director of the British Council USA.

However, while most employers are favorable toward degrees earned in the UK, they are not fully knowledgeable about them. They are most familiar with the top British universities, Oxford, and Cambridge, which cast a “halo effect” on the rest of the country.

If an employer has never heard of a university, they are most likely

to go the university’s Web site for more information about where that university ranks against U.S. institutions.

Students seeking to help an employer better understand their degree should provide details about the classes they have taken, as well as provide employers with a link to the university’s Web site along with a link to or evidence of a professional accreditation body’s assessment of their program/university.

To prepare students to explain their degrees, universities should help students understand the benefits of providing employers with relevant information about their institution and degree programs. One of the recommendations for British universities was also to create an employer’s page on their Web sites to show the industry links, their ranking equivalents, and as well as professional and internship information.

SOURCE: BRITISH COUNCIL, 2011.

ity and the availability of a research-based master’s program were major deciding factors for her. After graduating from Cornell, she knew she wanted to pursue graduate school but didn’t want to commit to a five-year PhD before she did a shorter master’s program to explore her interest of ecological research. Although she was accepted to Yale’s School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, she ended up enrolling at UBC—largely due to the financial aid package she was offered.

“Despite receiving a scholarship (from Yale), I would have had to pay more than \$10,000 in tuition, in addition to living expenses, whereas at UBC I was offered \$18,000 per year in compensation to pay living expenses, and tuition was only \$4,000 per year. Both programs were of great interest to me, but at that time I just couldn’t justify going into so much debt to attend a U.S. school when the offer from Canada was so good,” she says.

Education Down Under

IIE ranks Australia as the fifth most popular country of choice for Americans seeking degrees abroad. According to Australian Education International, 1,016 Americans pursued degrees at the bachelor’s level, 1061 at the master’s level, and 334 at the doctoral level in 2010. Two of the top institu-



tions for U.S. student enrollment are Bond University and University of New South Wales.

Bond offers lifestyle factors due to its location on the Gold Coast, Australia's tourist hot spot, as well as an extremely global student population with a 50/50 split between international and Australian students. In addition, unlike the rest of Australia, which runs on an academic year from February or March to November or December, Bond follows the North American academic calendar.

"Bond's big attraction is how we run our semesters. Three semesters a year, which line up with the semesters in North America. Australian bachelor's take three years (six semesters), and students can complete their undergraduate in two years and their master's in just 12 months," says Stuart Floyd, international regional manager at Bond. "That's only at Bond and the degree, even though they are shorter than American degrees, is considered equivalent to American degrees."

Ashley Waggener, international coordinator for North America at the University of New South Wales, believes an Australian degree is increasingly appealing for Americans.

"The postgraduate market is growing in several fields and will continue to grow as more people are looking for a way to make themselves stand out. Given the job market, people are willing to take that risk now because they don't have anything to lose. Why not go and have that experience? I think Americans are also often surprised by the rigor of academics in Australia," Waggener says.

Jeffrey Promnitz is a graduate who can attest to the value of previous education abroad experience in making the decision to pursue a degree abroad. He completed his master's in international business at La Trobe University in Melbourne in 2007 together with his wife, who enrolled in the same program. Although he had previously studied in Spain and spoke

Spanish, his wife had not so they narrowed their choices to English-speaking countries.

Promnitz' undergraduate education abroad experience certainly added fuel to his desire to pursue a graduate degree abroad. "My previous short-term study abroad played a huge role in this decision. Studying abroad as an undergrad tremendously opened my world of knowing that there is far more out there to understand, with respect to various cultures and people, than I had ever previously realized," he says.

Diverse Destinations

While the majority of Americans pursuing degrees abroad go to Anglophone countries, an increasing number are also choosing more unlikely locations.

"Even within the shorter study abroad programs, we are seeing more students going to nontraditional destinations because there is recognition that learning a certain foreign language, or being exposed to certain cultures or rising economies, will really be an asset when it comes to looking for a job. The same holds true for Americans who hold degrees from abroad," IIE's Rajika Bhandari says.

Douglas Ashby is an example of a student who pursued both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from these so-called "nontraditional" countries, many of which are now offering full-degree programs taught in English. After completing a few years at the University of Iowa, Ashby earned his BA in hotel and tourism management from the Bangkok University International College in 2005 and his MBA in finance from the Grenoble Graduate School of Business in 2009.

"I had always planned on an international career which is why I chose an international university for the first degree. I have always believed that emerging markets are where the twenty-first century will play itself out. So part of (studying in Thailand) for me was to develop key relationships to use in my future endeavors," he says.

His decision of France for graduate school came down to two major considerations: academic caliber and cost. "France has good business schools that can be had at a fraction of the cost of its American counterparts," Ashby says.

France and Germany are especially popular destinations for full degrees for U.S. students; as already mentioned, Germany was ranked third most popular and France was ranked the fourth most popular destinations for U.S. students to go to enroll in degree programs in IIE's recent report.

Furthermore, in early 2011, a British Council report, the Global Gauge, placed Germany as the top destination for international students. Australia was in second place followed by the UK, China, Malaysia, and the United States in sixth place. Three aspects of internationalization were examined in the study: student mobility, academic and research collaboration, and national policies. These facts about Germany's higher education system may have helped the country earn



Gouglas Ashby, left, earned his BA in hotel and tourism management from the Bangkok University International College in 2005 and his MBA in finance from the Grenoble Graduate School of Business in 2009

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the top rank: (1) International students don't pay more in tuition than German students, (2) a large number of degree programs are taught in English, and (3) German institutions have a reputation for encouraging their students to study abroad.

In February, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) New York had its scholarship selection meeting for U.S. students wanting to study in Germany for their graduate degrees. DAAD New York received about 300 applications for students who want to pursue a master's degree and about the same number of students applying for funds to pursue a doctoral degree in Germany; 93 of the applications came from Canadian students and the rest were from the United States.

According to Sebastian Fohrbeck, director of DAAD New York, there are several reasons why North American students find Germany an attractive destination to earn academic degrees. Aside for Germany's "high quality of higher education," Fohrbeck says that there are hundreds of bachelor's and master's degrees taught in English. "Almost all of these programs have zero tuition fees—compare this to Australia which sees overseas students' fees as a major source of income—Germany doesn't," he says. "Doctoral work in almost all fields can be done in English, there are absolutely no tuition fees at this stage. In addition, you can get a full scholarship from DAAD for the two years of the master's (or for up to one year as an undergraduate or doctoral student). The combination of zero tuition fees with a full scholarship—without any obligation to teach or work as a teaching or research assistant—are a package that's hard to beat."

Fohrbeck says that "the majority—roughly 90 percent—of the master's and doctoral programs students apply for in our scholarship competition are in English."

Holly Oberle is a current PhD candidate at the the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies. She also completed her master's in

international relations in a joint program taught in English between Jacobs University and University of Bremen. She began studying German as an undergraduate at Knox College in Illinois. In addition to her previous affinity for the country and desire to pursue an international experience, Oberle was attracted to Germany's tradition of tuition-free education and relatively low cost of living. She was also drawn to its central location in Europe and the ability to travel.

"I knew that I could spend two or more years living in Europe, I could probably see much of Europe and maybe even other countries for much cheaper than I'd be able to do it if I stayed in the U.S.," she says.

Although she acknowledges that her foreign graduate degrees might be an obstacle should she want to seek employment at Ivy League institutions back in the United States, Oberle believes her education abroad is positive: "I firmly believe that as the world continues to globalize, having international experience will be an asset, considering that students in much of the rest of the world are getting degrees at universities outside their home country."

Oberle also says that the impetus will be on her to explain her foreign education to potential employers. "Much of it will be dependent on how I can sell my experience abroad," she explains.

She is currently writing a book, *College Abroad 101*, which will be published later this year by Agapy LLC.

"There is really no practical reason why one should limit one's options to their national context," she says. "Many

in the rest of the world are looking beyond their borders for their degree, why shouldn't Americans do the same?"

To students, Oberle advises: "There are many excellent universities outside the U.S., and when you combine that with the extraordinary experience of living on your own abroad, your education is that much more valuable."

China, which is the number one country sending students to the United States, is also increasingly on U.S. students' radars. "Many receiving countries now have a lot of recruitment strategies to have full-degree abroad students at their universities. China is a very good example of this. Through the China Scholarship Council, they offer a number of scholarships for international students for full-degree programs. It's those sorts of investments by the Chinese government that have also led to the big shift in China where it's gone from the world's biggest supplier of international students to also now being one of the biggest host countries," Bhandari says.

In April 2011, Chinese State Councilor Liu Yandong and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signed the U.S.-China Consultation on People to People Exchange agreement, which includes a scholarship



for tuition and living expenses for U.S. students who enroll in Chinese universities for undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, according to *China Daily USA* newspaper. The initiative is related to President Barack Obama's call last year to see 100,000 U.S. students study abroad in China.

One recent high school graduate who recognizes the possibilities offered by China is Alex Sherr. While his educational background is certainly atypical for an American high school student, his profile fits that of many students who pursue full degrees abroad as undergraduates. He grew up in New York City, but attended the Hong Kong International School (HKIS) for high school when his parents' careers necessitated a move abroad.

It was in Hong Kong that he developed an affinity for all things Chinese. "As my years in HKIS came to an end, I was left having to make the hard decision of where I wanted to continue my higher education. I have always wanted to study international relations or business, and personally, I felt like I could get a better grasp of those topics living abroad, instead of in the United States," he explains.

Sherr considered a number of U.S. universities overseas, such as the American University in Cairo, but ultimately decided to take two years off, which he has used to intensively study Chinese in preparation for the Peking University entrance exam. In autumn 2012 he plans to study international relations or international business with the language of instruction in Chinese.

International Backgrounds and a Sense of Adventure

While not many U.S. students have had the extensive experience abroad that Sherr did as a high school student, recruiters from many countries—including Canada and Australia—say they tend to target international schools or those with International Baccalaureate programs rather than typical public schools, partly due to the fact that many high school guidance counselors are unfamiliar with international opportunities.

Sherr reiterates this sentiment. "Coming from an international school, (studying abroad) is something that's much

“Many receiving countries now have a lot of recruitment strategies to have full-degree abroad students at their universities. China is a very good example of this. Through the China Scholarship Council, they offer a number of scholarships for international students for full-degree programs.”



more accessible than for your average American high school student. I had access to fountains of information that were my guidance counselors, college fairs, and even other student's parents," Sherr says.

U.S. high school officials seem to have a greater awareness of Canadian higher education than they do of other countries, but even that can be limited. Michelle Rath, director of school counseling at Essex High School in Essex Junction, Vermont, believes that while many high school counselors many have heard of larger schools such as McGill or UBC, they still lack the knowledge to properly advise their students. "They are not familiar with the Canadian university system at all, nor do they understand the differences between Canadian universities, American colleges, etc. And many of them have limited personal experience with/in Canada, so it is not something that they actively promote with their students," she says.

Rath, on the other hand, very actively promotes Canadian education through a college fair, called "Consider Canada," she organizes each spring. "Given our proximity to Canada and the number of students with dual citizenship, we are seeing an ever-increasing number of our students in Vermont applying to schools abroad, especially to Canada, although not exclusively," she says.

Brad MacGowan, a college counselor at Newton North High School in Newton, Massachusetts, says he is seeing an increasing number of students who are interested in studying abroad, but not necessarily pursuing a full degree abroad.

Those who tend to go abroad for their entire education often have ties to the country as well as the means to go abroad.

"There are also the factors of idealism and pragmatism. Students possess these in different proportions. For the predominantly pragmatic student, the issue is grad school admission and/or a job. These students are more risk-averse and studying abroad all four years would be seen as a risk. The student has to be adventurous in more than just imagination, and the parents have to be willing to let them be adventurous," he says.

Deterrents to education abroad include name recognition and language proficiency. "Name recognition is so important with families that they are often reluctant to consider a college in the U.S. they haven't heard of, never mind one in another country," MacGowan says.

"Some students (also) haven't considered the fact that unless they are fluent—reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college level—in another language, they have to go to an English-speaking country or a college in a non-English-speaking country where the instruction is in English," he adds.

Returning Home

So what happens when Americans who pursue their degrees abroad return home and enter the labor market? In general, the consensus is that a degree from abroad doesn't usually hurt a prospective employee's chances. Employers evaluate the degree based on the institution where the candidate studied. As Jens Locher, manager of web strategy and student recruitment initiatives at UBC, puts it, "The value of the degree has less to do with the country it is from than the stature of the specific university itself."

Scarborough agrees, adding that the specific course of study is also important. She was a consultant on a recent British Council survey on North American employers' perceptions of UK degrees (see "The Value of a UK Degree," p. 37). One of the study's main findings confirms the general acceptance of an international degree. "It doesn't matter where you have gone to university. What's more important is that 'what you have studied' is relevant to the job you are applying for," Scarborough says.

Fred Sagel, an Ontario-based lawyer, interviewed many candidates with foreign degrees when he was a partner at two major law firms in Toronto.

"When I saw a foreign degree, I thought that was interesting. Someone who would leave the country to pursue an education has something going for them. They have a sense of adventure, which is also something you want to have in business," he says.

"The easiest thing to do is to go the university next door. [Going abroad] shows you have more imagination, are more intellectually curious, are more far reaching and that translates well into the workplace."

He says there is a tendency to assume that because you haven't heard of an institution before, the quality of education is somehow lacking. "The problem you've got is that there are a lot of unknown foreign schools. You tend to think that because you don't know them, they're not as good. But I've found the opposite and they tend to specialize in something. I'm prepared to find out about them, but I think most employers would not," he explains.

Sagel says he does pay attention to institutional rankings, but it isn't as important as characteristics such as critical thinking. "Rankings are important, but not as important as the individual," he says.

However, many recent graduates of foreign institutions have had difficulties finding employment once they return home—but they stress that this has more to do with the current economy than it does their foreign education. Smith took advantage of his three-year Canadian work permit to return to Vancouver when he was unable to find a job in the United States. His social ties to Vancouver coupled with relatively better job prospects in Canada cemented his decision to return. "Though the recession certainly has been felt in Canada, my peers there seem to have had an easier time finding employment postgraduation than my peers south of the border," he says.

Michelle Bolourchi is also considering going abroad again due to dire employment prospects in the United States. She recently completed a joint two-year MA in global studies through the University of Freiburg, the University of Cape Town, and three other institutions in Argentina, Thailand, and India. She returned to the United States in 2009 and has been unable to find full-time employment.

"More than anything, it's the U.S. economy that has impacted my career here. The reality of the recession here hit me like a slap in the face. I have decided that if I stay in the States, I will be going nowhere, fast. Since my networks and connections are abroad (the only real drawback to a foreign degree in the States), I will be joining the growing number of international workers," she says.

Smith also says the lack of local networks is another factor that might have hurt his employment prospects in the United States, but the international dimension nevertheless made his resume jump out of the pile. "On the one hand, many entry-level jobs in the U.S. are directly tied to regional alumni networks, which can be disadvantageous to those who studied abroad. This said, I found many employers I spoke with to be intrigued by my international experience and degree...in many ways it was something that made me stand out," he says. **IE**

CHARLOTTE WEST is a freelance writer in Seattle, Washington. Her last article for *IE* was "A 360° View" published in the international enrollment management and recruitment supplement with the September/October 2011 issue.