

# The NEW Inter

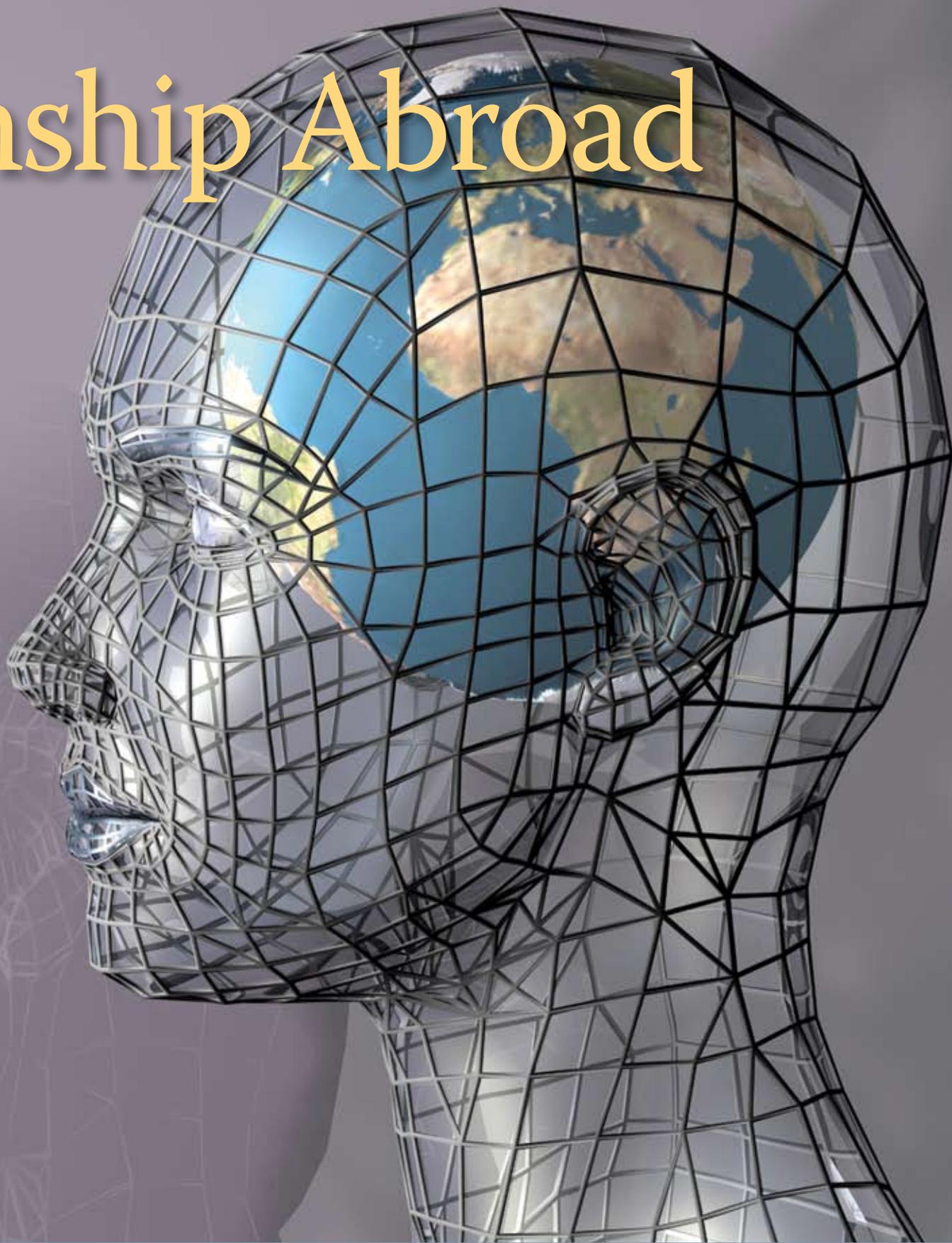
Internships are now more important to postcollege plans than ever but today, not only are students gaining work experience at home, they are also going abroad to attain a competitive edge. **BY KAREN LEGGETT**

“Understanding of the diverse cultures of the world, especially those of developing countries, should be an essential component of the twenty-first century education of our nation’s students.”

—*The Lincoln Commission*

**T**HE INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING fostered by education abroad is no longer simply desirable—it is *essential*. With the U.S. Senate declaring 2006 the Year of Study Abroad, The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program supports education abroad as the best way to gain global knowledge: “direct exposure to foreign languages and other aspects of these cultures can best be achieved through a meaningful study abroad experience.” But the word “study” does not only mean going abroad for an educational experience—it encompasses academic courses, internships, service learning and volunteering. According to an American Council on Education public opinion poll conducted in 2002, just under 200,000 college students—about 1 percent of total enrolled undergraduates—studied abroad in 2004-5 academic year, yet 50 percent of college-bound high school students are interested in study abroad and 75 percent think it important to study or intern overseas during their academic career. Internships abroad are becoming an increasingly popular way of studying abroad. Because students in large numbers are beginning to notice that interning abroad can be a valuable way to become immersed in another culture *and* gain work experience, chances are that internships abroad are fast becoming a permanent fixture in the realm of education abroad as a whole.

# nship Abroad



CHRISTOS GEORGHIOU / ISTOCKPHOTO

Fortunately for students, their options are almost limitless. In fact, the biggest change in internships is the scope and excellence of programs available, according to Martha Johnson, associate director of education abroad at the University of Minnesota. Google “study abroad” and 30 pages of links appear, from university sponsored programs to nonprofit organizations, subject- or career-specific opportunities. Boston University has fashion marketing internships for advertising students in Paris and public health internships with the World Health Organization and the Red Cross in Geneva. A business student at the University of Minnesota interned for the London Chamber of Commerce; two more Minnesota students worked for a film production company in London and the Labor Party. “The breadth and depth of what is available is amazing,” says Johnson.

Internships that receive academic credit are one niche in this vast panoply. Internships may be paid or unpaid, with or without academic credit, sometimes eligible for financial aid and often related to the student’s field of study or career plans. Students almost never receive both pay and academic credit for an internship. Kevin Martin, resident director, Boston University Auckland Programs, says students come away from internships with “a richer, more nuanced experience of the host country, its culture and work practices, than study alone can provide.”

“Work experience in another country is a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous challenge,” adds Michael Steinberg, executive vice president of the Institute for International Education of Students, “Students are in an environment that stretches them. Internships ought to be encouraged for career development reasons but also for personal development.”

### Internships With Academic Rigor

The challenge is to find ways to incorporate these experiential activities into academia. Brian Whalen, executive director of the Office of Global Education at Dickinson College, says he tries to help faculty see that experience is just one more way for students to collect data about the world; students are comparing, observing, and analyzing just as they would if they were reading or researching. Internships for credit typically include a more traditional academic component; credit is not given for the work itself but rather for the reading, writing and coursework that accompany it. “We can’t put a grade on a student’s office experience,” says Joseph Finkhouse, director, institutional relations, Boston University International Programs, “but a portfolio or oral presentation can be graded.”

As internships become more popular, educational institutions are paying more attention to the rigor of this academic element. Many programs, especially those organized by colleges or universities themselves, offer courses taught by U.S. or foreign faculty. “The study should be about the place where the student is working,” explains Finkhouse.

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“It’s important to think of academics in a global perspective. Don’t export to London what you can do perfectly well at home.”

Melissa Kirchner, a student at the University of Minnesota, had a double major in art and psychology. She interned at an art gallery in London three days a week, took four courses, including one on “Working in the European Union,” and completed a 30-page paper related to the internship. Boston University students in the advertising and public relations track take a course on British and European marketing strategy. In other cases, students may do a research project connected to their internship or create an independent study project with a professor on the home campus.

Boston College developed a Global Proficiency Program Certificate that requires study, internship or service abroad; two foreign language courses beyond the usual requirement; four international or multicultural courses in humanities, social sciences, business or education courses; four international co-curricular activities, including one service activity; and a presentation, reflective essay or other final project.

Designed by Adrienne Nussbaum, director of Boston College's Office of International Students and Scholars, the goal of the certificate program is to both encourage and document an international focus in students' academic careers. Nussbaum says 500 students were enrolled during the past academic year across all four undergraduate schools, a 30 percent increase from the previous year.

In 2002 members of the Forum on Education Abroad identified academics as the number one area of international education which could benefit from established standards of good practice. The Forum's proposed standards cover ethics and integrity; program resources; student selection and code of conduct; pre- and post-departure advising and orientation; student learning (intercultural understanding, language, intellectual and cognitive development), health, safety and security—and the academic framework which covers everything from credit and coursework to on-site advising and academic integration.

The Forum asks five key questions to help institutions measure the quality of internships:

- 1 Are the internships integrally related to one or more other courses in the program or to the program's location or theme?
- 2 Are any preparatory or parallel courses required or provided for students to do a credit-bearing internship?
- 3 Are internships monitored regularly and student performance evaluated or graded regularly by qualified academics or other appropriate professionals?
- 4 Is a research paper or other substantial final assignment required in order for students to synthesize learning internships and obtain academic credit?
- 5 Is the awarding of credit for internships consistent with home institution standards for awarding such credit?

Brian Whalen, president and CEO of the Forum, says a review process using the standards for all types of student experiences abroad is now underway at 18 institutions. The results will be published in March 2007.

Whalen also added a few other details to the standards listed above. Good quality control mechanisms often include a resident director who finds placements for interns, monitors student journals and guides students generally. "That translates to money," Whalen admits, "and you can't do it on the cheap." Dickinson rotates its resident directors every two years among faculty members and those directors are responsible in part for cultivating new internships.

Kevin Martin of Boston University encourages colleges and universities to set the academic threshold for entry reasonably high for internship programs. "It's difficult to balance academic work with an internship and it does no one any good to put a student in a position where he or she will have a difficult time." Martin also believes course work connected to an internship should be just as

rigorous as that found on the home campus and that the "internship and associated academic work should be structured so that students are forced to engage with it intellectually and thoughtfully." Melissa Kirchner, for example, was doing mostly administrative work at an art gallery in London. "Not always the most intellectually challenging work," she says, but she wrote a paper on intellectual property rights related to art that had a direct connection to the gallery's sales of prints and the rights of the original artists.

Writing about the internship experience is vital, says Whalen. "Students may have done a wonderful thing meeting with Cameronian children and being a teacher's aide, but the real learning has to be shown in the written work; this is often forgotten because it is such labor-intensive pedagogy." Whalen says that Dickinson College has also added a requirement for an oral presentation in the local language. The presentation is made to other students as well as internship supervisors so that it becomes a community learning experience. "Learning needs to be a two-way street," emphasizes Whalen, "and these presentations help bring the host agencies in as partners."

### Service Learning on the Rise

The reflection that comes with writing or presenting also defines service learning, distinguishing it from volunteering and typically making this type of internship eligible for academic credit. In fact, several international educators identified an increased interest in service learning as one of the most noticeable trends in international internships. Service learning experiences tend to be in the social services and account for much of the increase in opportunities in developing countries. The most growth has been seen in Latin American countries, according to William Nolting, director of international opportunities at the University of Michigan International Center. There are also more programs in Asia, especially southeast and south Asia, and a few programs in Africa, though the number there is still small. Many service learning internships are arranged with well-known nongovernment organizations (NGOs) like Amnesty International or CARE at the local, national and international level, or with much smaller, more local groups. Idealist.org lists more than 1500 service-related internships, many of them overseas, including a graphic design internship with a community-based organization in Uganda working to prevent violence against women and children and several opportunities with a nonprofit organization in India in which interns learn to document human relations violations and assist victims, practice conflict resolution or write grant applications. There are opportunities to teach English in Nepal, promote contemporary art in Ghana, or improve early education pedagogy in Tanzania.

The International Partnership for Service Learning and Leadership (IPSL) has been uniting academic learning with service to the community for more almost 25 years and now offers internships in

14 countries. Each IPSL program offers academic courses for credit at an affiliated overseas university or college, direct service to the community at an established local agency and homestay or dormitory living arrangements in the host country. IPSL President Nevan Brown recently offered a workshop with Indiana University and Purdue University on integrating education abroad and community service efforts on campus. “We had 110 administrators show up from around the country,” says Brown. “This is an area of real interest; administrators want to find international experiences for credit.” IPSL works directly with campuses, primarily as a third-party provider of programs but also by holding a biennial conference that provides training opportunities to help institutions create their own programs. Brown says this serves campuses that want to have a program led by their own faculty or those that have a hard time transferring credits or financial aid.

### Internship Timeline: Summer, Semester, or Year

“It’s important to understand what it takes to provide students with a significant experience that is more than just a trip,” explains Brown. The experience can be a semester or a summer or six weeks, though Brown believes it’s harder to provide a significant experience in just two or three weeks. “There are phases students go through in any kind of international, intercultural experience—exhilarated and depressed, exhilarated and depressed. In a two or three week program, they may only get part of the way through that cycle and not have the full experience of trying to deal with a culture that is not their own.”

Brown says that high-quality international service learning internships require significant advance work by colleges, covering basic health and security issues as well as the rigor and reciprocity of the service experience. It is important to identify organizations overseas that can use students effectively while giving them a chance to be immersed in the culture and obtain a good view of issues in the society. “Emptying trash cans in a clinic is not a learning experience,” notes Brown. “Doing intake interviews in the clinic will teach a student a lot more because students are asking questions and hearing information that will tell them about the health and economic conditions of the people who are coming to the clinic.” This immediately raises another issue about the level of language proficiency a student needs to be effective in a particular setting.

Although many students are not able to spend an entire academic year abroad, Tan Huynh, a Spanish and sociology major at Dickinson, found it especially valuable to study one semester in Spain and work the second semester. Huynh worked with a nonprofit organization in Malaga called The Movement Against Intolerance. He spent three days a week working with children, helping them create peace posters, and learn conflict resolution skills. He wrote a paper on school violence in Spain, based more on academic resources and interviews than personal experience, but he also confirmed his in-

terest in working with children and teaching Spanish. Huynh would agree with Brown’s recommendation not to shorten an internship too much. “Don’t blitz the experience,” advises Huynh.

IPSL links all of its own programs to a local university, in the belief that part of the immersion should be learning about different educational systems. “Faculty who come from the United States can be valuable,” says Brown, “but there is also value to students being exposed to high quality academic talent from another country.” Brown is also a strong believer in reciprocity. Service learning internships must offer a valuable service that has lasting value to the host organization or community. Service learning provides “education that makes a difference in the life of a student while also making a difference in the life of the local community.”

Brown is not surprised by the growth in international service learning internships as universities seek to become more engaged in the local and world community. “Being in the classroom is not sufficient for a well-educated person. There is growing interest by students and faculty in finding better ways of linking theory and practice.” IPSL programs are expanding most rapidly in developing countries like Ecuador, India, and Thailand. Several international educators mentioned the growing interest among students themselves in social justice and the impact of globalization on developing and industrialized countries.

### Putting the Student First

Many well-established programs, whether offered by colleges or third-party providers, pride themselves on being able to tailor internships to individual student interests and academic needs. Brian Whalen at Dickinson mentions one student who identified an internship in Mali working at an AIDS clinic. Students can earn credit for such internships by working directly with a faculty sponsor. The Institute for International Education of Students (IES) found a unique internship for a pre-dental student to work as a dental assistant in Barcelona. Michael Steinberg says IES has about 200 potential internship locations on file in Barcelona, but “we are always developing new locations.”

This raises another important element of effective international internships: the importance of direct personal consultation with the student preparing to go overseas. When a student starts a conversation by saying “I’d like to do an internship,” Martha Johnson at the University of Minnesota promptly turns the question around. “What do you mean by that?” She wants students to identify their primary goal in going overseas—career preparation? language immersion? Are there multiple ways to achieve a particular goal? Why is a student considering an internship over a study program? The level of project work might be higher in an English-speaking site, but the language immersion and even cultural immersion will be less. Increasingly, she says students want advice on which program

# Learn More

NAFSA's The Education Abroad Subcommittee on Work, Internships, and Volunteering Abroad (WIVA) focuses on international educational experience through programs that offer such alternatives and/or supplements to the traditional study abroad program. Themes include outcomes assessment, best practices, data collection, research, resources for advisers and administrators, and articulating linkages between international educational experiences and international careers. To learn more, visit [www.nafsa.org/WIVARESOURCES](http://www.nafsa.org/WIVARESOURCES).



is best and they want a program that is clearly defined in advance.

Brian Whalen at Dickinson agrees that both students and parents are savvy shoppers and parental involvement is definitely on the rise. Whalen says he has to make a much more conscious effort to include parents in the process, adding that “it’s a balance between treating the student as the person in charge and acknowledging the parent who is trying to push along the application.” He is pleased, however, by the number of parents who visit their students overseas; Dickinson even has an apartment in Toulouse for visiting parents.

Student Tan Huynh at Dickinson urges students to know their interests and then find an organization with the same interests. “Volunteer organizations are always interested in volunteers. It’s important for students to network even when they are already in the foreign country.” It’s also important for students to be pro-active interns. Kristin Stewart is a peer advisor at the University of Michigan International Center. “Don’t assume that the U.S. concept of an internship is meaningful abroad,” she writes in an online essay. “You may be viewed as a regular employee or they may not know what to do with you. You will need to be very pro-active to make the most out of your experience.” Michael Steinberg at IES urges interns to “discuss the work with their supervisor, volunteer for work within the assignment. The motivation must go beyond having an experience that will look good on a résumé. We put the emphasis on the cultural experience rather than the job experience.”

## Perceptions of Education Abroad on the Home Campus

**B**ill Nolting at the University of Michigan believes international educators must always be ready to articulate to students and administrators the value of an international experience to the student’s overall education. He urges study abroad offices to work with campus career offices. “Career offices focus on internships and summer jobs. But study abroad offices need to be

involved in the work abroad area because they have the depth of knowledge about the international experience. There is room for some collaboration.”

Better collaboration and earlier student advising may also expand the pool of students who can take advantage of international internships. If students become aware of overseas opportunities when they start college, it is more likely that they can schedule required courses on the home campus in the right sequence to accommodate a semester abroad. In a survey by the Forum on Education Abroad, only 38 percent of student advisers said they “usually” or “always” include education abroad in advising students on their education requirements. The Forum called it especially disappointing that, given the need for teachers to have greater global competency, almost half the institutions surveyed “rarely” or “never” accept study abroad credit for student teaching. The Forum recommended investigating the accrediting and training requirements for education majors. Students in more technical programs like engineering or business also have difficulty squeezing an internship onto their already-full academic plate, although there are organizations that focus specifically on internships in these fields (usually for pay rather than credit and often offered during the summer) such as IAESTE (The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience), CDS International, or AIESEC.

Just as Web-based information about internships is increasing exponentially, Nolting also says the Internet is increasingly replacing in-person advising. He distributes a weekly electronic newsletter on education abroad opportunities, including internships. There are 6,000 subscribers out of 35,000 students on campus. Nolting also manages a very comprehensive Web site on international student experiences, including an entire section on internships featuring both general information and requirements specific to the University of Michigan. “If I didn’t have Internet capability,” says Nolting, “I couldn’t be much of a player.”

Yet Nolting and other institutions still bring people together in person to promote international opportunities for students. In collaboration with Michigan State and Eastern Michigan University, the University of Michigan offers a series of panel discussions every fall called International Career Pathways. There are discussions on internships for graduate and undergraduate students as well as careers. An “opportunity fair” at the end of the panel discussions brings about fifty organizations to campus.

Boston University brings its students together after their overseas experiences. A relatively new group called the Boston Area Study Abroad Advisors hosts a re-entry conference for students. It’s a one-day event attended by hundreds of students from Massachusetts and beyond. There are photo and essay competitions, networking and résumé-writing opportunities as well as workshops on how to keep your internationalization going and leverage your international experience professionally.

### Leveraging Internships

**M**ining the full value of an internship can be just as critical as completing the actual work assignment overseas. Many say the experience can be “life changing.” Students who have truly internalized their experience “come back fearless,” says Joe Finkhouse at Boston University. “You are talking on a professional level when you return from an internship,” says University of Minnesota intern Emily Schmieg. Her internship working with social workers at the Bayswater Family Center in London, she confirmed her passion for working with families in poverty. During her senior year back in Minnesota, Schmieg volunteered at a project for homeless families and realized she had some skills and even the “potential to create change even with an after school program.”

Tan Huynh’s internship confirmed his interest in a career involving children. “My favorite days were the ones I worked with the kids,” said Huynh who worked with fifth and sixth grade students in Malaga, Spain. “My friends said ‘you can always tell the days Tan has worked with kids because he comes in happy.’” Huynh believes he came back from Spain with a deeper appreciation for his own schooling, especially liberal arts. “Small liberal arts colleges with small classes don’t exist in Spain,” he said. Besides, an internship “is not passive learning, it’s active learning. It’s much better than conjugating verbs.”

Numerous surveys have concluded that students who have overseas internships are more likely to have international careers than those who study abroad. In a recent IES survey of more than 3,700 IES alumni, 83 percent of the students who had an internship abroad said it allowed them to acquire skill sets that influenced their career choice. However, Martin Tillman, associate director of career services at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), writes that “students too frequently accumulate international experiences in an ad hoc fashion...and

have difficulty articulating—in resumes and job interviews—how their travel, study or work abroad experience informs their overall career decision-making.”

Tillman edited a two-volume guide on the *Impact of Education Abroad on Career Development* for the American Institute for Foreign Study (available at [http://www.aifsfaculty.com/pdf/Impact\\_of\\_Education\\_AbroadII.pdf](http://www.aifsfaculty.com/pdf/Impact_of_Education_AbroadII.pdf)). He believes “campuses are increasingly recognizing the need to actively assist students in articulating how their overseas experience has provided greater clarity about their future career goals, and strengthened particular skill areas of importance to the employers for whom they hope to work.” Just as colleges and universities are not willing to give academic credit just for going to work everyday overseas, Tillman says employers do not value internships or prior international work experience for its own sake: what can you demonstrate that you learned? Intern Melissa Kirchner learned that firsthand. “I worked in another country. I can adapt to any situation. How many people can say they worked in London in a competitive field? An interviewer asked the most questions about my overseas experience. Even if the experience doesn’t apply directly to the job, it makes you stand out.”

Tillman adds that for many years, international educators just wanted to get more students a measure of learning and experience outside of the United States. Now that international experience needs to benefit a student’s professional life as well. “If you’ve never left Des Moines, merely to be in London is a good thing, but use how it felt to be in London as a stepping stone to a more targeted experience.” This targeted experience can be at the undergraduate level as students accumulate multiple international experiences but even more at the graduate level, where the motive for internships is more closely linked to a career. Because of this career link, Tillman says postgraduate internships often do not provide academic credit. He adds that SAIS, for example, offers financial aid so students can afford to take an unpaid overseas internship. Tillman believes community colleges sometimes do the best job of linking international internships to careers. “Not everything needs to be vocationally directed, but the world is much more competitive in terms of job seeking,” emphasizes Tillman. The competition is global as well; U.S. students may be competing with Chinese students who earned their M.B.A. in the United States. And those American M.B.A. students, are now seeking work experiences and internships in India. “Once you have M.B.A., students thinking it’s good to do the world,” says Tillman, “something has shifted. There is acknowledgement that you do have to gain a practical understanding of what’s happening in the world by getting out there.”

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