

An Exploration of the Demand for Study Overseas from American students and Employers

An analysis of how future employment considerations are likely to impact students' decisions to study overseas and employers' perceptions of candidates with overseas qualifications.

Prepared by J. Walter Thompson Education for the Institute of International Education, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the British Council, and the Australian Education Office.

The international student market continues to grow with forecasts predicting that this will continue for many decades to come. The US is no exception to this with both the number of international students studying in the US growing as well as the number of American students electing to study overseas increasing. However, the number of outbound students is significantly smaller than the inbound number. Addressing the issue of how to encourage more American students to study overseas was the objective of this research project. For the first time, a consortium of country level exchange organizations from four countries formally joined together to specifically look at this challenge, these included; the Australian Education Office, The British Council, DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), the Institute of International Education, the US Department of Education and the US State Department.

The objective of this study was to determine the employer acceptability and market value of an international degree among US audiences specifically students and employers. To achieve this, we explored:

- Do US students with an international qualification find it difficult to obtain employment when they return to the US?
- Are there real or perceived problems with employer recognition and acceptability of an overseas qualification?

- Do employers value overseas experience in prospective employees and if so why (what do they perceive to be its value) and to what degree?
- Is this reflected in their recruitment policies?
- The obstacles to overseas study from both audiences' perspectives

The project comprised qualitative research conducted amongst prospective students, students who had undertaken an overseas study experience and employers, including both HR Directors and CEOs; the quantitative phase involved 100 interviews with HR Directors and 100 interviews with students who had undertaken overseas study. The project looked to identify among students and employers what were their perceptions of overseas study (both full degree experiences as well as short-term programs), who or what influences these perceptions, what their real experience had been in terms of employment, what were the barriers to purchase and ultimately how to overcome these.

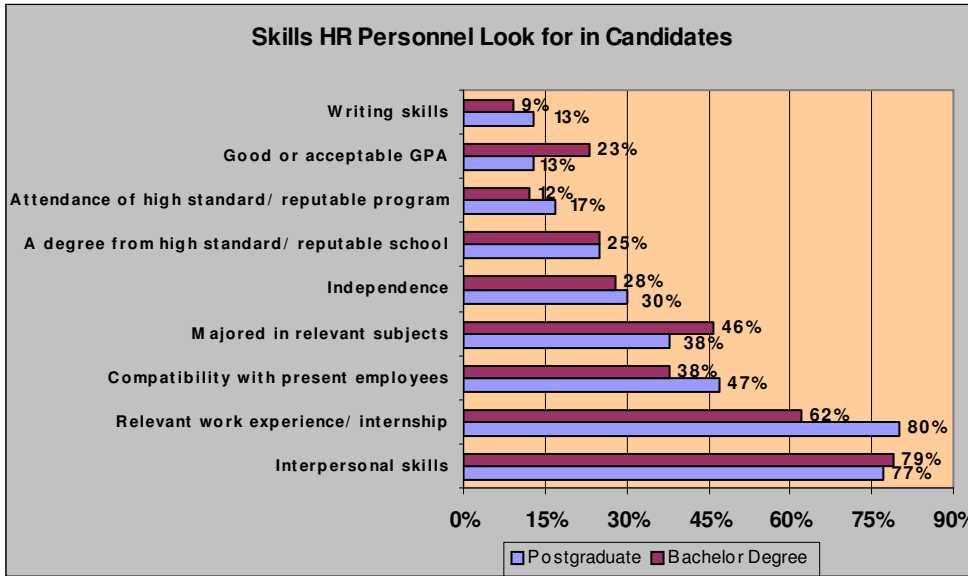
The study revealed a significant opportunity to really build the awareness, profile and reputation of studying overseas among key target audiences – prospective students and employers. The findings showed that employers most important selection criteria in recruiting a candidate are interpersonal skills, and when questioned employers believe that these skills are likely to be strong in a candidate who has had an overseas education experience. The challenge really is to more effectively link and promote this connection. Currently, very few employers specifically recruit candidates with an overseas study experience, unless they require either cross cultural skills or a job specifically requires it. The research revealed a real need to strongly promote the link between those interpersonal attributes that employers find so desirable and their acquisition through an international study experience.

From the alumni perspective, American students who had studied overseas (either a component or a full degree), the findings were even more positive. Interestingly, future employability did not really play a major role in their decision to study overseas, alumni chose to study overseas for a variety of reasons, the primary one being *a desire to experience another culture or to see another part of the world*. However, from a general future perspective and in their own personal experiences in finding work, students stated more advantages than disadvantages to having an overseas education. These advantages included factors such as *it brings up conversation during the interview; employers are impressed that I had the courage to study overseas and international education/experience is sought after*. In terms of disadvantages, only a few students stated any. These included *employers are unfamiliar with overseas universities and qualifications, an overseas degree is not transferable to the US equivalent (or accreditation issues) and the reputation of an overseas degree is not as good as a US qualification*.

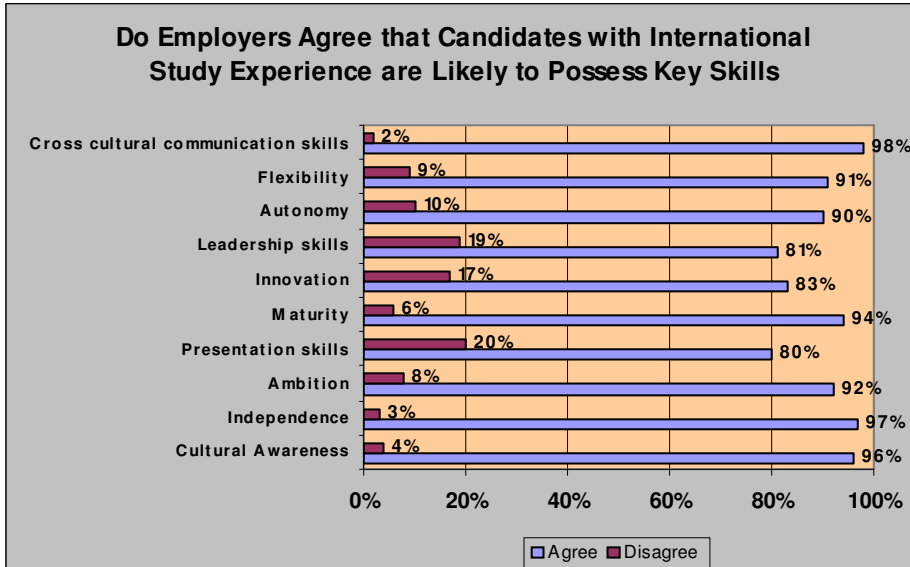
Interestingly, Alumni also believe that a degree with an international component or a full degree from an overseas university would be just as attractive as, if not more attractive than, a degree from a US University, to employers.

The group of research sponsors is currently in the process of reviewing and developing strategies to address these issues to help the study abroad community and future employers understand the specific strengths that a study abroad experience gives a candidate.

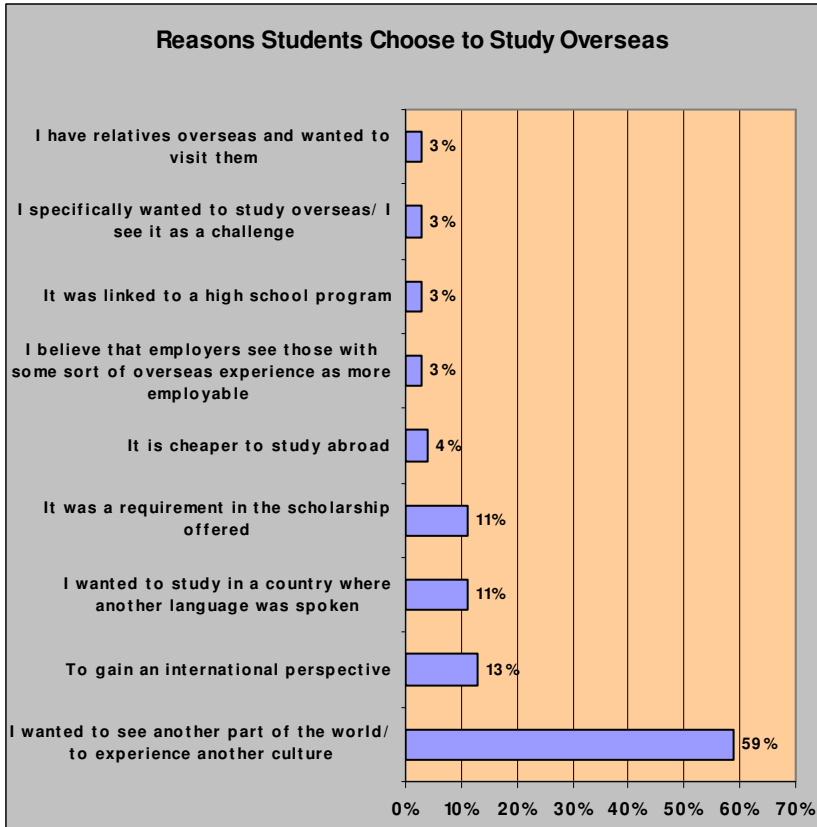
The most important selection criteria to employers in recruiting a candidate are interpersonal skills



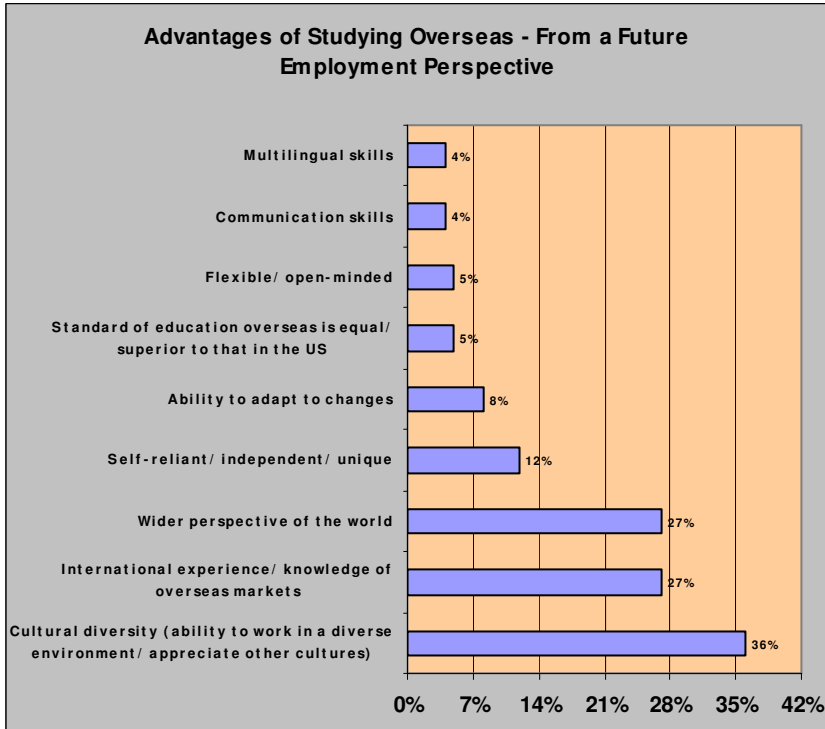
Are candidates with international study experience likely to possess key skills that are desired by employers?



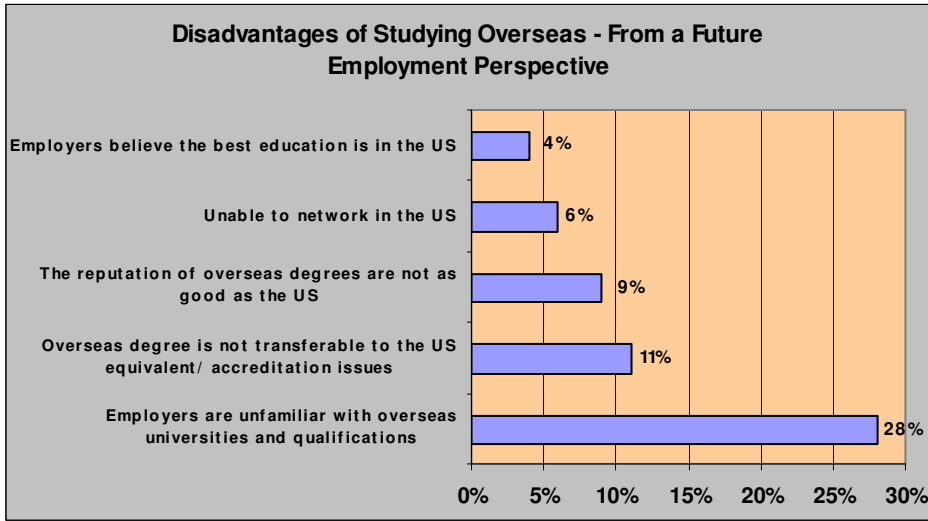
Reasons students decided to study overseas



Advantages of having an overseas education from a future employment perspective



Disadvantages of having an overseas education from a future employment perspective



Overseas education vs. US education – Perceptions of alumni and HR professionals (mean ratings based on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all attractive and 10 is extremely attractive)

	Undergraduate Degrees		Postgraduate Degrees	
	Alumni	HR	Alumni	HR
Full degree from a respected US school with study abroad experience in a non-English speaking country	8.39	7.4	8.4	7.3
Full degree from a respected US school with study abroad experience in an English speaking country	8.26	7.8	7.8	7.7
Full degree from a respected US school	7.92	8.1	7.66	8.2
Full degree from a respected school in an English speaking country other than the US	7.62	7	7.69	7.1
Full degree from a respected school in a non-English speaking country	7.2	6.6	7.03	6.8