

The Global Marketplace and Internships Abroad

FOR QUITE SOME TIME, education abroad has been seen as a valuable résumé enhancer for students entering an increasingly global marketplace. But international educators know that one of the challenges for students in making that item on the résumé truly meaningful is being able to articulate exactly how education abroad has really prepared them to function effectively in a global business environment.

One of the answers to this challenge may be in the nature of the experience itself.

“Students today understand the value of a work abroad experience to leverage themselves in the global marketplace” says Beth Miller, senior internship coordinator at Weissman Center for International Business at Baruch College of the City University of New York (CUNY). “An international internship allows students to learn about a different culture, including the business culture, and gain a general understanding of global markets. This allows them to become more competitive candidates for companies, which today have more of a global footprint.”

According to Tony Johnson, president of the Academic Internship Council (AIC), employers, “particularly in times of austerity” are seeking people who have risen to challenges that make them stand out. “An international internship provides a chance for students to develop both personally and professionally—to be independent, and to discover the world of work at different levels and in different cultures. Experiential education has become—quite rightly in my opinion—an almost compulsory part of the academic experience,” Johnson says.

And though the numbers are hard to pin down, partly because many internships abroad are not-for-

Examples of Government Support for Internships Abroad

BRAZIL

Brazil Scientific Mobility Program <http://www.iie.org/Programs/Brazil-Scientific-Mobility>

EUROPEAN UNION

The Erasmus Program http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/erasmus_en.htm

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

100,000 Strong Initiative (China) http://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/100000_strong/index.htm

PASSPORT TO INDIA

http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/in/passport_to_india/

THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP

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<http://www.thelanguageflagship.org/overview>



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Danielle Hemsley at Farmamundi with her boss and coworkers during her internship abroad

Interning Abroad in Spain

WHEN DANIELLE HEMSLEY GRADUATES from Baruch College, CUNY this spring, she will have not just one but two internship experiences to put on her resume—one of them in Spain. Last summer Hemsley spent eight weeks in Valencia working for Farmamundi, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO), in their Área Logística Humanitaria (ALH), which is involved in international disaster relief efforts. Her work involved market research about English-speaking NGOs that might be potential customers. “I reached out to various organizations, to build brand awareness of ALH,” Hemsley says. Among the skills she developed and knowledge she gained, “I learned about business development. I strengthened my ability to conduct Internet research. I became more familiar with international companies and international websites. My Spanish improved. I learned about NGOs, and about Spanish and European culture. I learned how it feels to be far away from home in a place where you don’t really speak the language. I now have an even greater appreciation for international students and immigrants in America. I also learned that I am more adventurous than I thought I was.”

One thing she would change if she were to have such an opportunity again, Hemsley says, is to have better linguistic preparation. “If I had it to do over, I would go to Spain a few weeks before the internship began and take an immersion Spanish class. The communications barrier was one of the main challenges. I got creative in expressing myself through acting things out, and using my basic Spanish.”

Hemsley plans to pursue a career in multicultural consumer insights marketing research. She believes that the experience she gained in her international internship will be invaluable. “It was a great opportunity to gain exposure to and learn more about Spanish culture and work practices. I was exposed to so much new cultural information, which will surely benefit my future career.”

When asked what she would say to students considering an internship abroad, Hemsley says, “Do it! Be open-minded, and if you have opportunities to try new things, say yes, even if you’re scared.”

credit and thus are difficult for institutions to track and report, it is pretty clear that there is a rapidly growing trend toward students doing internships abroad.

“U.S. students are beginning to explore going beyond traditional study abroad, and are seeking hands-on, practical experience in addition to what they can learn in the classroom,” says Rajika Bhandari, deputy vice president of research and evaluation and director of the Center for Academic Mobility Research at the International Institute for Education (IIE). “The growth is quite dramatic. In the 2002 *Open Doors* report, about 7,000 U.S. students reported participating in internships abroad. By 2011 the number had grown to 25,000, a 241 percent increase in just ten years.” (These statistics include both for-credit and not-for-credit internships.) And a January 2013 IIE report, *U.S. Students in China: Meeting the Goals of the 100,000 Strong Initiative*, says that of the more than 26,000 U.S. students who studied in China in 2011, 11,000 were involved in various not-for-credit experiences, including internships.

Going abroad for an internship can improve intercultural skills, which can be used in potential employment settings both abroad and in a student’s own country as well.

“Having completed an overseas internship is seen by many employers as an added advantage, in that the student not only has professional experience, but has gained it abroad and, therefore, can bring new knowledge to the domestic organization,” says Valerie Hoogstad, former director of international education at Australia Catholic University and current lecturer at Sydney University. “In addition, such a qualification is proof that students have learned to negotiate and work in teams with people in other cultures.”

Meeting the Challenges of Internships Abroad

“One major challenge is placing monolingual students,” says Kristina Holubova, senior program director of internships abroad at Cultural Vistas, a nonprofit organization dedicated to facilitating connections between U.S. students and international visitors through international exchange. “Technical and science students are easier to place

in English-only professional positions, but placements in the humanities and liberal arts often require at least basic skills in another language. Foreign language acquisition is of utmost importance, and we believe should be further encouraged in higher education.”

Another major obstacle can be funding. At Baruch, a public institution, “for many students the biggest challenge is the financial commitment,” says Miller. “Between the

airfare, program fees, and so on, internships can cost anywhere from \$1,500 to \$8,000.” Nevertheless, about 30 Baruch students participate in internships abroad each summer. The students do not receive credit for their internships, but all international interns at Baruch are provided with a scholarship that covers their airfare, an initiative made possible by the support of a foundation.

According to Katja Kurz, university



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relations coordinator at Cultural Vistas, “Efforts are being made to increase international mobility for students traditionally underrepresented in international exchange, for example STEM majors, Pell grant recipients, and minority and nontraditional students. We have recently launched several programs reflecting this trend, such as a fellowship specifically targeting STEM majors and students from underserved communities for professional experience abroad, and a joint project with the Halle Foundation for career perspectives in the STEM fields for students from historically black colleges and universities.”

Not surprisingly, financial support helps grow the numbers. Governmental initiatives and public-private partnerships can help make internships abroad a viable prospect for students, and sometimes even a requirement.

“In Europe the trend [an escalation in international internships] started about 20 years ago, but it has definitely increased in the last seven years, in the context of the Erasmus program, in which internships abroad within the EU are supported financially by a grant,” says Gabriele Abermann, coordinator of English and intercultural communication, information technology, and systems management at Salzburg University of Applied Sciences. She adds, “In the Austrian universities of applied sciences sector,

Have clear objectives and sufficient resources

“Institutions need to commit time, resources, and research to the endeavor. Work abroad cannot be done with a ‘cookie cutter’ approach; each student wants and needs different things from an international work experience. Institutions need to know the immigration and legal ramifications of any international travel for a student.”

Beth Miller, senior internship coordinator, Weissman Center for International Business, Baruch College, CUNY

Prepare students for intercultural challenges

“Intercultural awareness is necessary for an overseas internship. Students need to be made aware of many factors, more than just ‘The food is different,’ and ‘They use words I don’t understand.’”

Valerie Hoogstad, former director of international education at Australia Catholic University and current lecturer at Sydney University

Be sure that internship abroad opportunities are supported by and in compliance with your institution’s policies for health, safety, and risk management.

“The typical campus divide between academic affairs and student services must be transcended in order to encourage and support both curricular and not-for-credit internships. The same kinds of support provided for health and safety in study abroad (health insurance, travel registry, predeparture orientation, etc.) must also be provided for internships abroad. Ideally, support should also be provided for the learning itself through opportunities for structured reflection.”

William Nolting, director of education abroad, University of Michigan

Make sure to follow up in terms of integrating internships into the curriculum, and provide guidance for students in how to use their experience abroad in their career development.

“I believe more attention needs to be given by institutions to students who are returning from these fantastic experiences. The job is not over when a student gets on the flight home. Students need help in channeling this new knowledge, wisdom, and experience into a meaningful tool that will help them both academically, and in their search for a career.”

Tony Johnson, president, Academic Internship Council

internships are a compulsory component in all bachelor programs, and an optional one in

quite a number of master’s programs.” And in government-supported initiatives in the United as well as elsewhere, internships are increasingly being seen as a central component in education abroad experiences.

The Role of Third-Party Providers

Opinion is mixed on the pros and cons of using third-party providers for internships abroad. Johnson has set up programs in 11 different cities around the world. “I strongly believe that institutions are much better served by appointing a third-party provider who already has an infrastructure in the city of interest,” he says. “These providers should have local staff on hand to deal with all the preparation and, once started, the managing of internship programs. Local knowledge is everything. Students should have strong preparation and orientation, as well as counseling available to them before and during the placement. This can only be done properly by



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on-site professionals who are an integral part of the local working community. It cannot be done effectively from a thousand miles away by faculty members or administrators who have too much to do already."

Jeff Whitehead, director of the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, agrees. "I recommend working with established partners," he says. "We work with an organization [who helps us] manage much of the logistical work. They help arrange items such as housing, paperwork, and even some placements, in places where we are unable to leverage our own contacts."

Others recommend a hybrid approach.

"The institution needs to establish first exactly what the objective of their program is, and how many resources can be set aside for establishing it," says Abermann. "Building [institutional] relationships to companies will eventually be better, as these connections may be useful also for other potential collaborations; but this takes time, so a combination approach might be a good start."

And according to Miller, "It really depends on what the institution's students are demanding. We continue to grow and learn about the area of work abroad based upon our interactions with students and their areas of interest. It requires dedicated resources, which can be a problem for some institutions. Since it is so resource-driven, an institution really has to do both in terms of direct placement opportunities, and working with third parties."

Emerging Developments in Internships Abroad

A recently established annual Global Internship Conference <http://globalinternshipconference.org/> offers educators the opportunity to discuss together the challenges and current issues of international internships, as well as best practices and emerging trends.

When asked what some of the new and exciting developments in internships abroad are, Johnson says, "There is a growing demand for internships in the less traditional academic areas. For example, my son has just completed a six-week placement on an eco-farm on the West Bank in the Palestinian territories. And a program I am working on right now with

the University of California, Berkeley, and St. Xavier's College in Mumbai, is offering internships with an emphasis on global poverty. Students will work on issues such as health-care, homelessness, and the environment in surroundings where their efforts, now and in the future, will make a huge difference."

He adds, "Over the years at the AIC and its predecessor organizations, we have seen more than 20,000 young people immersing themselves into a work environment and

culture that is not their own. That in itself has to be good news for everybody." **IE**

JANET HULSTRAND is a writer, editor, and teacher based in Silver Spring, Maryland. She has created and taught literature courses for Queens College, CUNY in Paris, Florence, Hawaii, and Cuba, as well as faculty development workshops for programs abroad. Her most recent article for *IE* was "When Faculty Teach Abroad" in the January/February 2013 issue.

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