

Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce Through Study Abroad: The Value of Study Abroad Skills in the U.S. Job Market

Executive Summary for Business Leaders

The United States is experiencing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In education, we have seen schools struggle with how to keep students and their families safe while continuing to provide the same quality education students have come to expect at U.S. institutions. This has been especially true with international education and study abroad, as international travel has been severely limited. Students, families, faculty, and administrators will need to consider new health and safety concerns related to the pandemic even after international travel returns around the world.

Prior to the pandemic, NAFSA: Association of International Educators partnered with Emsi, a U.S.-based economic modeling firm, to analyze hundreds of millions of U.S. job postings and professional profiles to determine the connection between study abroad and employer-desired skills. The new report, [*Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce Through Study Abroad: The Value of Study Abroad Skills in the U.S. Job Market*](#), found that in 2019:

- More than 31 million job openings required skills that a student acquires while studying abroad;
- Employers spent more time seeking qualified applicants for these positions vs. the average job opening;
- Employers and job seekers recognize that skills developed during study abroad are essential for management and leadership positions; and
- Professional profiles that highlight the key study abroad soft skills included a higher number of those holding positions as presidents and CEOs than those without those skills.

These findings are further evidence of the incredible value of an international education and why every U.S. student should have the opportunity to study abroad. Unfortunately, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, far too few students participated in study abroad. Only 10% of students study abroad before they graduate, meaning that 90% of graduates are entering the workforce without the global skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to position them for success in the global economy.

Recommendations

For U.S. business leaders, the findings solidify that study abroad generates key skills essential to developing a successful workforce. Employers should seek to:

- Hire individuals with study abroad experience, as these skills promote success in managerial roles.
- Connect with career centers at U.S. colleges and universities to better identify recent graduates with key soft and global skills.
- Articulate clearly within their recruitment efforts the importance placed on soft and global skills acquired through study abroad.
- Train human resources staff to identify and value international experiences as contributing to soft and global skills.
- Advocate for increased U.S. government resources to sustain study abroad and support legislation like the [Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Act](#) that would increase the number and diversity of U.S. students who study abroad during college.

