

Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce Through Study Abroad
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Webinar Transcript

Welcoming remarks by Esther Brimmer, DPhil, NAFSA Executive Director & CEO

Esther: Welcome everyone. Thank you all for joining us this afternoon. My name is Esther Brimmer and I am the executive director and CEO of NAFSA: Association of International Educators. I want to welcome you to this important discussion on the role of study abroad in developing a globally competitive U.S. workforce and the release of [NAFSA's latest report](#) which builds on previous studies in skills development and study abroad and affirms that U.S. students acquire and develop skills during their study abroad experiences that are especially essential for management and leadership positions.

I want to welcome the policymakers, business leaders, and international educators who are joining us in the audience today. NAFSA is the world's largest nonprofit association dedicated to international education and exchange. NAFSA's 10,000 members are located at more than 3,500 institutions worldwide, in over 150 countries. Our members work to facilitate the exchange of college and university students and scholars.

We convene people virtually and—eventually again—in-person to disseminate practical information for professionals. We host the largest Annual Conference in our field and in November 16-20, which is International Education Week, we will host the new all virtual NAFSA IEW Campus Connection.

In addition to supporting the work of our members, we are also the leading voice representing the field of international education with policymakers in Washington on international education, study abroad and global learning as well as student and workplace visa issues and the need for a globally engaged citizenry.

We are delighted to publish this new report “Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce Through Study Abroad.” NAFSA has been focusing on the topic of global workforce development for several years now to reinforce the connection between international education and the skills and experiences that employers are looking for when hiring.

Why? Because the U.S. economy is inextricably linked to the global economy, offering both opportunities and challenges to American businesses that must rapidly adapt to new markets and new demands. As business models and needs change, the American workforce will need to be globally competent and comfortable understanding different languages, cultures, and ways of working.

If the United States is to maintain its competitive advantage in the global marketplace, business leaders, higher education professionals, and policymakers will need to work together to ensure that colleges and universities are adequately preparing students to compete for the jobs of today and tomorrow. This means providing an internationalized

curriculum across all disciplines, foreign language education, and study abroad opportunities for all students, in order to generate a globally competent and career ready workforce.

As an organization, NAFSA has worked for many years to increase the number and diversity of students who are able to study abroad. Earlier this year we published a book on *International Partnerships*. Which focuses on strengthening connections among colleges and universities in different countries can help create a framework for more students to be able to study with others from around the world. Our other publications include, the book *Promoting Inclusion in Education Abroad: A Handbook of Research and Practice* and the guide, *Incorporating Education Abroad into your Career Plan: Before, During, and After Your Experience Abroad*.

In our policy work, we advocate for the passage of the [Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act](#), which would significantly increase access to study abroad to many, many more students. But even with the Simon program, there will still be a significant percentage of students who will not have the opportunity to study abroad, so we are also focused on the broader goals of internationalizing the campus, which includes improving the curriculum, research partnerships, international faculty, scholars, and students, and a host of other internationalization activities.

While we recognize that the COVID-19 global pandemic this year has been hugely disruptive and impactful everywhere across the world, we also recognize that it has not altered the goal of achieving a global-ready workforce; in fact, it has created a stronger imperative. Global learning is needed more than ever today as it confers societal benefits well beyond the classroom. From managing a global supply chain to working effectively in emerging markets or making scientific and technological advances, U.S. graduates need to be able to work with citizens and understand cultures from around the world.

Before the pandemic struck, there were more than 5.3 million students pursuing tertiary education outside their own countries. In an era of competition for scarce global talent, the countries that draw the world's best and brightest to their universities are the countries that will have the best talent pool from which to fill their cutting-edge jobs. The countries that create the most attractive environment for the world's finest scientists will do the most to enhance their scientific leadership. Indeed, the very diversity that we gain through openness to international talent itself fuels innovation and creativity.

As I mentioned at the outset, NAFSA has been focusing on the topic of global workforce development for several years now, and in ongoing conversations with NAFSA members and partners in the business community, we have learned that employers value international experiences and global skills, but it can often be difficult to quantify that value in tangible ways.

To attempt this, NAFSA partnered with Emsi, a U.S.-based global labor market consulting firm, to quantify the impact of study abroad on workforce development and its value to the U.S. labor market, believing that the results would help to identify trends in the labor market useful for the field of international education and useful in advocating for study

abroad and global competencies with policymakers, stakeholders, and on-campus decisionmakers.

I now want to introduce the moderator for today's discussion, President of McLarty Associates and NASFA board member, **Nelson W. Cunningham**. Nelson W. Cunningham, JD is president and cofounder of McLarty Associates. Under Cunningham's leadership, McLarty Associates has developed into a firm with global reach and a global team of more than 100 seasoned international specialists in 21 countries. He is a member of the State Department's Advisory Committee on International Economic Policy, and past chairman of the Export-Import Bank Advisory Committee. He understands the vital links between higher education and economic productivity. Among his many projects, he serves on the boards of Yale-NUS College in Singapore, is a member of Yale University's President's Council on International Activities, and the board of Business Council for International Understanding. Newly reelected, he begins his second term on NAFSA's board in January 2021.

Nelson W. Cunningham, JD, President of McLarty Associates and NASFA board member

Nelson: Thank you, Esther. I appreciate the opportunity to lead a discussion on such an important topic. As you rightly say, the United States cannot remain globally competitive without a citizenry equipped with global skills and knowledge. Ensuring that many more U.S. college students have access to study abroad as part of their academic preparation is vital to U.S. competitiveness.

This new NAFSA report illustrates that the skills U.S. students acquire through study abroad are highly sought by employers. Therefore, it is important that U.S. higher education, employers, and policymakers prioritize study abroad as essential to developing a successful workforce.

I want to introduce today's panelists, who will help to illuminate this point. They are: **Trevor Gunn** – he is Vice President for International Affairs at Medtronic, the world's largest medical technology company. He also serves as an adjunct professor at the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies (CERES) in Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service. **Lorie Johns Páulez** - she is Director of Education Abroad at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. She has worked in international education for over two decades, for organizations and institutions in the U.S. and in Spain. **Jill Allen Murray** – she is Deputy Executive Director for Public Policy at NAFSA. She directs the organization's public policy agenda, including congressional, Executive Branch, media and grassroots advocacy strategy and implementation. With that, I will ask Jill to start us off by sharing a bit about why NAFSA pursued this report, and how the report's findings help make the case for study abroad. Jill?

Jill Allen Murray, Deputy Executive Director, Public Policy, NAFSA

Jill: Thank you, Nelson. I appreciate this opportunity to review the findings from NAFSA's latest report on study abroad and workforce development. As Esther noted,

NAFSA has been focusing on this topic for a quite some time now, examining the ways international education helps to foster key skills that employers seek when hiring.

For example, we hosted two roundtable events in 2018 which brought together experts in higher education, public policy, and business, where all agreed that the United States needs a workforce that is globally competent.

Building on this effort, last year, we pursued a collaborative research partnership with Emsi, a U.S.-based labor market research firm. Emsi had access to two different datasets to explore the connection between global skills, study abroad, and the U.S. labor market: first, a database of tens of millions of job postings from around the country, and second, a database of approximately 120 million US-based professional profiles.

In the first part of the study, Emsi, working closely with NAFSA staff, developed a list of preliminary keywords and skills associated with study abroad and global competencies to use in searching the job posting database, and analyzing trends in the U.S. market, such as job types, the companies with these job types, and the associated skills being sought in those jobs.

In the second part, Emsi scoured its professional profile database for keywords associated with study abroad and global competencies to identify individuals with such experience. Emsi then analyzed the resulting profiles to evaluate the professional outcomes in terms of the types of jobs and companies these individuals tended to work for, along with the skills they promoted on their professional profiles and resumes.

As a result, their analysis 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;
- Professional profiles that highlight key study abroad soft skills included a higher number holding positions as presidents and CEOs than those without those skills; and
- People with study abroad experience are working at top companies in the U.S. in greater numbers than those without study abroad experience.

The report goes on to make specific recommendations for both colleges and universities and for employers to consider. For example, colleges and universities should seek to:

- Guide students to highlight specific study abroad experiences, along with the skills acquired through these experiences, in online job profiles and resumes; and
- Ensure programs and course offerings align with the shifting demands of employers recruiting a global workforce.

While employers should seek to:

- Connect with career centers at U.S. colleges and universities to better identify recent graduates with key soft and global skills; and

- Articulate clearly within their recruitment efforts the importance placed on soft and global skills acquired through study abroad.

We recognize that not all study abroad experiences will generate the same outcome for every student, and that study abroad is not the only way for students to develop key soft skills like communication and leadership. But the findings do help to reinforce that employers are looking for the kind of skills that an international education provides, and that 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. In fact, only 10% of students pursue study abroad prior to graduation. This is why NAFSA continues to advocate for a national study abroad program through passage of the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Act, which would significantly expand the number and diversity of U.S. students who study abroad.

COVID-19 has restricted international travel and paused most, if not all, study abroad programs. But international travel will be restored soon, and we need policymakers, business leaders, and higher education institutions to be ready to address this challenge together. Thank you so much, Nelson, back to you.

Nelson: Thank you so much, Jill, for that a terrific description of the report and its highlighted findings. Let me turn first to Trevor Gunn with Medtronic. Trevor, thank you again for joining us today. Can you tell us just as a way to help orient our conversation, a bit about your own background? Why you, from the Medtronic standpoint are supportive of education abroad and the value that it brings to your company?

Trevor Gunn, Vice President for International Affairs at Medtronic

Trevor: Well, thank you very much, Nelson. Hello, Esther, good to see you again. Jill, thanks for all the hard work on this report, first of all. Pathbreaking and confirmatory in almost equal numbers. Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment and colleagues, thank you for joining us. My personal background is a very varied one. Mother from a war-ridden Alsace-Lorraine in France, who grew up in the middle of the war on a farm that was occupied by Germany. I'm 40 years an American Buddhist. There aren't many of us hanging out in the United States. That gives you a sense of my multiculturalism which also comes from my relentless pursuit of language: I tried eight in my career. I don't speak nearly as well as Nelson or others here, but Swedish, French and Russian are areas where I focused most of my time.

Once upon a time, I was an exchange student in Sweden, back when there was nobody else going on exchange programs, 1979 to 1980 and I ended up marrying my wife--32 years married--from the same town where I actually was an exchange student. So that's my personal background in a few moments. But you asked about Medtronic, and maybe that needs even more explanation. We are not a household name but as you said, Nelson, we are the world's largest medical technology company: about \$30 billion in revenues, about \$143 billion in market cap, which is not unsubstantial. But forget all the financial metrics, as at the end of the day, we are in the process, and very much a part of, curing

disability and preventing death and that's exactly what we've done through the crisis and we'll have time to talk about that.

But we make 131,000 different types of medical technologies, many of which are implanted in people's bodies. We're the inventor of the pacemaker, you may know, but do a lot of things that are very, very tied to whether the people in different positions have empathy. And if you translate that to mean different languages, understanding different cultures, understanding of people, different people's backgrounds, all of this is truly critical. Unfortunately, I'm not a great believer that you could learn a lot of these things in a crisis situation on the job. You have to have it as, as the report recommended, in advance. Certainly, many people have been forced into very difficult situations. We'll come to that a little bit later, but having these skills and intuitions with you, for free, either from family or your school, is where it's got to be had, in my personal view.

Medtronic's also had the experience that success and failure are really determined by the presence or the absence of these types of skills that we've been talking about and that the report reviews in more rigid detail. And I think that's incredibly important because, if you look at success, business or failure, and particularly at the failure aspect, a lot of it has to do with misunderstanding. It has to do with, say, negotiations that drag on forever oftentimes, or that may reach unpredictable endings. A lot of those really don't come down to the product or the service being offered. They really come down to some factors about the context in which that product or service was actually being offered and how well that person actually explained it. That is particularly true in a highly emotional sector, such as the one that we're dealing with, where, literally, life and death is often determined by how successful we are, or in certain cases, where we actually may fail.

So, overall, I just simply say that that business needs languages, business needs cultures, business needs exactly what many of us all on the call are gathered here to talk about. And one thing that's always irritated me frankly, throughout the many years, is that we often characterize some of these skills, which I personally-- I think Nelson you do as well, as do many of us, in business—consider to be vital aspects of success, are somehow “soft skills,” or not equivalent of hard skills. I disagree with that. So many times I can actually pin our success or failure exactly on the absence or the presence of these types of skills. I'd like us all to talk about languages and cultural understanding as hard skills. Don't let folks push these types of talents, or the individuals that want to pursue these type of important training and education programs for their careers or just for themselves, to the side. Thank you.

Nelson: Thanks so much, Trevor for that. And thanks also for sharing your personal story. I think the one thing we don't have to explain to students is that one of the benefits of studying abroad is perhaps they might fall in love with one of the wonderful people they meet and change their life that way. And that's wonderful that you built that into your life. Lorie, thank you for joining us today from Georgia, Georgia Tech. Over the years, I've done a lot of work with UPS and UPS has a very robust program with Georgia Tech. And through that, I've gotten to know your internship program, and the way that Georgia Tech connects with employer's skills. Lorie, can you tell us a bit about Georgia Tech's internship

program and about how you connect students with the employers who you hope might someday hire them?

Lorie Johns Páulez, Director of Education Abroad, Georgia Institute of Technology

Yes, absolutely. Thank you for having me. Just a quick side note: Medtronic might not be a household name in some places, but it is at Georgia Tech because one of our alums is your former CEO, Bill George, and he is a huge supporter of international programs. It is kind of interesting for two of us to be on this panel together today.

Georgia Tech was founded back in 1885, and we've always had a very strong connection with industry throughout our entire history. We are a very selective research institution. And our largest college is our college of engineering. It has over 14,000 students, so we're actually the largest college of engineering in the United States. Currently about 66% of our college of engineering students study abroad in some form before graduation. Overall, our numbers are 56%. We are a large sender of students in programs abroad.

One of the things that Georgia Tech has also had for many years is a cooperative program, which a lot of engineering programs have, where students can actually go and do real work in between study semesters. Our program is one of the oldest in the country. It's about over a hundred years old. We have a long tradition of students doing work assignments, domestically. Back in 2005, we realized some students--because we have over 7,000 international students--are also doing some of those work experiences abroad. We decided to formalize that.

The way that we develop our program is, you can't do it alone. One thing that's very key about our success and about how our program works is that we partner with key units on campus and with industry. We work very closely with our Career Services unit, for example. Career Services deals more with domestic internships and actual job placements, but they have lots of information that they share with us. We also work very closely with our development officers. A lot of our opportunities come up when development officers are out in the field and they're recruiting alumni, asking for donations. Another way that alumni can give back to their institution is through offering internships for students. We work with our alumni association. We work with the Georgia Tech Research Corporation, which is our research arm. We also have a lot of different groups on campus, including the Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute, which we affectionately call E I squared. That's another group that does economic development and innovation and startups. We have the Advanced Technology Development Center. We have Create X, which is a startup launchpad venture lab. And we have the InVenture Prize as well, which is where our undergraduates are encouraged to compete to get funding for a startup. We try to make sure that our Office of International Education is very involved in those activities and meets with key people.

We also ensure for example, that when our university partnerships are signed--I know a lot of universities have MOU--for a bilateral exchange or some sort of cooperation, we talk to them about possible research internships in their labs or in other places that they have

connections with. And so we do try to go ahead and build that into our academic bilateral exchanges as well.

Some of our top signature programs are ones where, for example, we work with a team unit where students would go and do a traditional exchange in the fall, and then they stay on and intern at Siemens or BMW, or one of the partners that they work with in industry while they're in Germany. So we have a few of those pipelines as well. The top ones we work with are NCT Japan, Siemens, BMW, TUM Prep, which is a research internship opportunity through the Technical University of Munich and New Zealand, Chile. And of course, Airbus, because of our aerospace group.

We also focus on student preparation. We have a course called “preparing to work in the global economy” and staff from my office actually teach that course and we prefer for students to do it before they go on an experience. It does have some intercultural components as well as some practical information. The other thing I would say is that the program is also successful because of our students. Our students are driven, they're very interested in these opportunities and sometimes they find their own opportunities. And so we're also happy to help students participate in international internships that they do source on their own as well.

Nelson: Thanks so much, Lorie. This report, “Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce Through Study Abroad” does a number of things. It draws on the existing literature in the field. It takes a look at the evidence about the skills that students develop as they study abroad that they bring into the workforce. And it looks at the skills that employers are looking for. You're an educator: you're dealing with your administration, dealing with your faculty, you're dealing with your students. Can you comment for us on how you think that you and educators like you can use the findings and recommendations of this report to help to help your work?

Lorie: Yes, absolutely. When I was reading through the report, the things that jumped out at me personally from an educator's perspective would be the advocacy that you can do. Reports like this give data points and credence to the things that we as international educators already know. It's very important when you have resources like this, to use them. You can use them to [advocate with your executive leadership](#). Our executive leadership is very interested in showing the value of our degrees and the value that our degrees bring to students once they graduate and that they can get a job and get a good salary. By showing that they're more likely to get a good job based on having these types of experiences, it's an easy advocacy tool. I think also advocacy with fundraising is really important because showing that international programs contribute to real value added, again, for our students and for their success in college and post-college once they are out looking for their job prospects, that can speak to getting some donor funding or support from the administration as well.

I think it's also important to use information that this report provides, for example, in student recruitment for the programs. Because students, at least at Georgia Tech, are very practical and they're looking for the return on investment. When they come into our office to ask about going abroad, they don't say, Oh, you know, “I'm romanticizing wanting to

go to Spain or Japan.” Their first question is: “where can I get the courses I need and what is this going to do for me in the future?” I think that information like this again gives us real tangible data to share with the students and say, look, this is what it'll do for you in the future. And also, this is for selling it to parents as well, because college is more and more expensive. Many parents are left wondering, should they fund a semester abroad. And then also [working with employer relations](#) is very important. We're all competing for the internships and sponsorships and job placements with companies once our students leave us. And so again, this gives us some real tangible data points to show our employers when we're trying to get spaces at Medtronic and others.

Nelson: That's terrific, Lorie, that's a great description. Trevor, you're on the other side of this as an employer in the business community. I know in your own personal life, and at Medtronic--through the interesting story of your founder, the Georgia Tech graduate, who is helping to fund some of the international training there--this looms large, but tell us, how do you think people in the business community can use this report to help promote these goals?

Trevor: Right, Nelson. On one word that comes to mind if I read the report, if I try to translate it into business terms, is competitiveness. American businesses want to be competitive. We want our government to be competitive. We seek reasonable advantage to be able to do what we need to do. And what we do as a country--I know that we'll get back to the [Simon bill](#)--is obviously incredibly important, in terms of the findings that may lead to more action and funding for these types of programs. But competitiveness at the end of the day is what I think that we need as a country. I think in practical terms, as I looked at my colleagues who were promoted or not promoted within the company, and at companies that have similar roles to my own, and even in other industries, I think that [study abroad] is always seen as, as something that's either neutral or positive and there's never a negative and that's really, really important. I think every potential employee wants to get their edge in the job market today. Lorie, as you mentioned, it is super important. Why wouldn't you want to have that advantage and why wouldn't you want to profile that advantage?

The higher and higher that you go within management at global companies, in small and medium sized companies--actually about 80% of our companies are small and medium sized companies that have global markets--and it's equally true at large global companies, the more you need to have those types of skill sets that are being called for here in the report. One thing that helps us all, and that helps almost any job seeker in any situation with almost any organization, the thing that we often consider to be the number one thing that we look for in our leadership development program for about 14 people that come into our company-- we're about 95,000 employees every year--is “making sense of ambiguity.” Now that may sound like anybody can do that, but I think that those that have these types of skill sets either from their family, by education and training that they've received, is an incredibly, incredibly important skill set to have. And I think that that's one particular skill set that most multilingual multicultural colleagues may actually downplay in their career search, strangely enough, but I say they should be doing exactly the reverse at this particular moment, particularly. Thank you.

Nelson: Trevor, one thing you said really resonated with me, which is: it's never a negative. I do a lot of hiring myself, both people just out of school and people well into their careers. I also spend a lot of time counseling students who come to me looking for advice. And the one thing I've learned in that, all that experience, there is no possible way to waste a summer or a semester in college, no possible way. I look back on the experiences that students have had. Every single bit of it is enriching to them. And there was not an employer in the world that will say, why in the world did you waste a summer in Thailand? What were you thinking when you went to South Africa to study anthropology? What could you possibly have been considering when you went to Mexico to study Spanish? Whether or not an employer is in international business or not, I've never heard of an employer who would view an experience like that as a waste of time. Even if you don't need the immediate skill set that the student picked up in that semester, you appreciate the fact that that student knows a lot more about how to deal with people, adversity, different experiences, different cultures, different languages and they come back with a resilience that they just didn't have when they, when they left. So that, that point really resonated with me, Trevor, the point of resilience.

We're living in a strange time, the COVID 19 pandemic and it's influenced certainly the business community tremendously and you all know how much it's influenced the academic community, the academic experience. Higher education has had to change the way that it teaches students right now, companies have had to change the way that you do your own operations. You're having to think about the way that you onboard new people. We all have to bring on new people, even when it's remote, even when it's in this strange experience. Given that and given the difficulties we're experiencing now, what do you think is the path forward for study abroad? How can we get past this point and keep the vitality of the experience and keep the value for the employers in the years ahead?

Trevor: Nelson, first maybe quickly on how Medtronic plays into COVID-19 directly. It has consumed almost every moment of our time since February. And the reason why, as you probably know, is that we are a large producer of ventilators. I've coined what we've done in the past few months "ventilator diplomacy." We've talked to, I think, every president and prime minister's office on the planet. And these people didn't know ventilators, didn't know us. I think they certainly know us a little bit better now, but what you have in the organization, is people who did not have a particular role that was slated to be globalized, have now been forced into globalization and understanding the world around them. As businesses and government, we've had to make a lot of really, really quick and snap decisions around things that really are consequential and they certainly do affect life and livelihoods in the ways that probably only historians are going to be able to fully account for. Some of these things you can learn on the job, needless to say. I'm not saying that you can't learn them on the job, but wouldn't you want to have all these things in advance? Wouldn't you want to have these in your back pocket, things that you can just pull out, in terms of languages and an understanding of cultures? You don't want to have to locate some of these places on a planet, literally by going over to a map, right? So I'm just simply saying at the end of the day, these are things that many of the people on the call do for a living, we all do them. You do them in terms of counseling your students, Nelson, it's a wonderful thing.

But what I would say also is that just because we can't see each other in person doesn't mean that things and we all have to that the world comes as part of the seams or is frozen. Let's just give you just a quick example: training and education. You may or may not know medical technology companies do massive amounts of training and education. Before COVID-19, 5% of our training and education, which is chiefly done of clinicians and doctors, was done remotely, and about 95% in person training--literally you're working on dummies. Certainly, you can imagine what surgical training is about today. That's exactly inverted. So 95% is all online, 5% in person, which is a shocking statistic. And I think our educators here on the line understand what that actually means, but not only that, but we have education and training courses going on at about 15 times more than what we had before the crisis, in places in the world and cultures and countries that most people, frankly in most global organizations could not plot on the map. So it's, it's opened up a whole different level of opportunity in democratization of knowledge, around medical, in the medical profession, and in healthcare as, as people seek solutions for themselves and their families. And those as this difficult moment. Let me keep it there.

Nelson: That's terrific, Trevor very insightful. Lorie, COVID-19, the pandemic, the stresses it's imposing on your world. Talk about the future and what are the recommendations that you think we should be making the policy maker is as we look to get past this?

Lorie: Yes, well as you can imagine, the entire field of international education has really been struggling with COVID and all of the negative impacts to our field. In the future, mobility will return. This will end and mobility will return. Students are ready and interested in going. We still have tons of interest in programs and they're ready to go when things improve. One thing that myself and a lot of international educators have been doing is pivoting to other ways to ensure that students are getting global engagement before they graduate. My fear is that we could have an entire generation of graduates that don't have these experiences. And I think that would be detrimental not only to the students, but also to the business world.

So we're looking into what we call "global at home" programs, virtual experiences and things that can still have an intercultural component to it and give students some of those types of experiences without getting on an airplane. I do think that these types of experiences will continue on. I think that they will complement the actual student mobility that will return hopefully in the next couple of semesters. I do think that one thing that COVID has shown everyone is that diversity is really important in our programs. And I do think that legislation such as the Simon bill is something that speaks directly to that. And so I do think it's more important than ever for us to advocate for the Simon bill, as a source of creating some modest funding, but also to help universities diversify their populations because, I've been in the field for over 20 years and the conversation is the same every year: we don't have enough funding for all the students that need it to have these experiences. I think that having a bill like that to stand behind, to really put a focus on making it a priority for the United States and for our economy is super important.

Nelson: Well, thanks, Lorie. And obviously we're hoping that this report can be used [with policymakers](#) to help advance the goals of the Simon Act to help continue to get the important federal support for study abroad and to push back on, frankly, some of the some of the more difficult perspectives on international exchange students, students abroad, and foreign students studying here. So thank you for highlighting those points. I think we've got some a little time to answer some questions from the audience. And I think you all know that if you have questions, you can post them in the ask a question box here. There are already a couple here, and there's an excellent one here for Trevor. And this is a real life question. And it's this: what are the key points about the study abroad experience that students should emphasize in the resume, cover letter and interview to make themselves stand out from others who have studied abroad and from those who have not studied abroad? How can students highlight this experience in a way that can be most meaningful to employers?

Trevor: Well, I love what you said earlier Nelson, about a summer in Thailand. Let's take Thailand as an example. Let's--I'm Russia trained so I usually start with the bad news--please don't emphasize the fact that you've been on beaches and how many islands you've hopped. So that's the bad news. However, how many things are different and potentially applicable to things that you did during that summer? I'm just using your example of a summer--obviously the more time is better, right? So if you visited historical places...Often the United States is, I'm not gonna say a-historic, but we have sometimes a very poor understanding of history. And when you get into business conversations, say in a place like Russia, you almost always start by talking about history. You start by talking about culture. So, emphasize those things that truly are portable and important, even though we may some sometimes de-emphasize them here in our own culture. Certainly focus on the areas of if you have something, some practical skills that came out such as learning the Thai language. And even if it's a few perfunctory phrases. Showing that basic respect is so critical. So the more practical and applied the better, the more touristic probably I would maybe deemphasize you may have a different answer. I don't know if there's a right answer to this. Nelson?

Nelson: I think that makes a lot of sense, you know, and this actually ties in to a question that that we also had from someone else, but I think I'm going to stick with you, Trevor for a minute to answer it, which is: CEOs and senior executives may intuitively understand the value of studying abroad, but the hiring manager who's sitting in front of you, who's looking to fill a very specific spot, may not. Is there a way that you can express your experience in a way that vaults over that hiring manager, who's looking for a sales associate to do X, Y, Z.? Are there broader skills that you think study abroad teachers that a student could use can express to that hiring manager and say, look, I, I hope this will make me a better employee overall?

Trevor: I've always thought that there were three kind of three top skills that I've always tried to emphasize, wherever I possibly can, to younger colleagues that are trying to get more involved in international business. So language is sometimes not sufficient in and of itself. Language is always a great compliment to business skills and then to other potential technical skills, but it has to be truly a global job for that to be true. Not global by name, but global in fact. There are many titles where there's global in the name, but

not global in fact. They're probably looking at five candidates that have business skills and that are going to have, potentially, technical skills. They may come from Georgia Tech, Lorie, they probably have. But, that language piece, that cultural piece, is going to put them right over the side. Because at the end of the day, we think about business. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with people understanding what the needs are on the other side of the table, whatever that other side of the table is. And great, you have a bunch of technical skills, great. You have a bunch of business skills, but, Excel? Everybody speaks Excel. Many people speak the same business, but if you are not able to adapt to the reality in terms of the language and cultural competence aspect of it, you're ultimately going to be less effective. Not saying you're not going to be effective but you're going to be heck of a lot less effective. So I would certainly say that that's really important. And to also tie it to corporate objectives, like our, our chairman today, who's, by the way, chairman not only of Medtronic, but also Intel Corporation at the same time-- don't ask me how he does it--Dr. Omar Ishrak. He put three strategic objectives on, and number one was globalization. If you're able to tie it to that, you're able to angle the right way into the situation that you described there.

Nelson: Great. Thank you, Trevor. Lorie, I want to go back to your side of the house on this. You talked about how your students come to you and they say, well, what's the value proposition for me of study abroad? You know, another important constituency in all this are mom and dad, the parents. Persuading, mom and dad, that Thailand is not just going to be about lying on beaches and chasing girls in hostels or chasing boys across bars. But a report like this one, how do you think that we can use this kind of report to help the parents understand the value of this?

Lorie: Well, I think one thing that we try to focus on at Georgia Tech is that it's a very competitive marketplace once the students graduate and while they are graduating from a top institution and they're going to have all the technical skills that they might need, but as you're talking about having the soft skills, examples that we give them are: when you work as an engineer in a team or as a software engineer for companies, very rarely is there no one who's from another country, working in that team. And so, we do focus on the things like that, and that employers are looking for people that have had experiences so that when they get thrown on a team with lots of different cultures mixing together, that they can actually get along and deliver the product.

It's also something that's very important. once people get into the business world, working with clients. I can talk about students, or even my own husband, who's from Spain who worked for Cisco. He constantly is working with clients from other countries and sometimes they've worked with him once and they request him because he gets them, is what they say. I think that these are all really good examples. And I think that this report really outlines that businesses are in it to make money. And they're only going to make money if they hire people that can further their mission or further their products or treat the clients in the way that the clients want to be treated. I think when you're talking to parents and they're looking for that return on investment, we can use information that we can glean from this report about the things that employers are really looking for.

One thing that we also try to do is we try to let parents and students know that we don't just send them and say, okay, good luck. When they go out on these programs and when they come back, we actually do some re-entry programming. We help the students unpack the experience. We work with mock interviews. We help them with resume and interview questions about how to work in an experience rather than just saying, Oh yeah, I went to the beach in Thailand and dude, it was awesome. We want them to be able to actually articulate in that interview, why Thailand was awesome, but in a business context.

Nelson: Thank you, Lorie. And I'm afraid that we have run out of time here today. Our hour is up. Jill, I was going to ask you a question about how you were planning on using this report with legislators and congressmen and senators, but maybe we'll have to save that for another session. But I know that a lot of NAFSAns are going to want to be helpful there in connecting with their members of Congress and using their experiences to help sell them on the ideas that this report helps emphasize. I'd like to thank Lorie Valdez from Georgia Tech. Thank you for giving us your experiences there. You didn't tell us how you met your Spanish husband, but again, maybe in the next session, you can give us that one. Trevor, thank you for telling us how you met your wife on an exchange program and how that helped shape your career. And thanks for giving us the business perspective. Esther Brimmer, thank you for sponsoring this entire study and this session, and to all the NAFSAns, and others who have joined to watch us, thank you. Thank you for the time. Thanks for the good questions and all of you be safe.

RESOURCES REFERENCED DURING THE WEBINAR

[The full report, “Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce Through Study Abroad”](#)

[Report executive summary for international educators](#)

[Report executive summary for U.S. policymakers](#)

[Report executive summary for business leaders](#)

[The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act Issue Brief](#)