

# Studying Abroad During a Global Pandemic

## Define Your Experience for Employers



Students often study abroad to achieve personal, academic, and career goals. However, students like you who embarked on experiences abroad in the spring of 2020 were presented with circumstances that were unforeseen.

You faced the unexpected, abrupt return from an experience that involved careful planning and anticipation. Now you've returned, but you might still be in an uncertain world with your immediate future up in the air. You may also be grieving how you meant to spend this time.

How do you tell a story of your experience abroad that is significantly different than what you anticipated? How do you focus on what you learned rather than what you were unable to complete?

As time passes, we hope you'll begin to recognize how much you accomplished, despite returning early:



The **resourcefulness** and **resilience** it took to plan and execute your time abroad



The **adaptability** and **tolerance for ambiguity** that was necessary while planning a jarring departure



The **leadership** and **problem-solving** required to continue your coursework back in the US

Despite your time abroad not going as planned, these are great accomplishments.

The Learning Abroad Center is a resource for you in this phase of making sense of your experience abroad during COVID-19. The following are some steps that can be helpful in first reflecting on your time abroad, then reclaiming your experience by leveraging the skills you gained for your future career.



### Recognize What You've Overcome

Take time to recognize what a unique experience you've been through. Being abroad, in an unfamiliar place, while navigating a global pandemic, is stressful.

For many of you, departure from your host country happened very quickly. In many cases, this journey took many twists and turns as airports closed, flights were shut down, and delays were endured. Your study abroad dreams were cut short.

Acknowledge how much has changed, from the time before you went abroad, to while you were in your host country, to your abrupt departure, and finally to where you are now. Recognize how much you've navigated.

Whatever your journey was, everything you went through makes up your experience, your story. Your story proves great resilience. Your experience was not a failure but rather a challenge to which you successfully rose.



## Reflect on Your Experience

Now that you've revisited your study abroad experience, begin to think about how this time has made you feel.

Reflect on your journey in its entirety, from the moment you started planning until now. This will help you start recognizing the ways, for example, in which you were resilient and resourceful, and the type of leader you were.

### Consider the following stages in your journey:

- How did you feel when you decided on your program?
- How did you feel when you arrived in your host country?
- How did you feel during the first few weeks of your program?
- Prior to learning you had to leave, what was the biggest challenge you faced and how did you deal with it?
- What details do you recall of the events leading up to your departure? Consider the following moments and how you felt while navigating these changes:
  - The moment you found out you had to leave your program
  - Preparing to leave and say goodbyes
  - The moment you left to start your journey back
  - The process of traveling internationally during a pandemic
  - The moment you arrived at your final destination
  - Adjusting to a new daily life and continuing your courses from your time abroad

In navigating these changes, consider: What were the most challenging and frustrating parts? What were you most fearful of, what are you most grateful for, and what are you most proud of? What did you learn about yourself that surprised you?





## Reach Out to Engage or Find Support

Talking about your time abroad is often one of the best ways to process the experience, especially after a semester as ever changing as yours. Even a “normal” return from study abroad can prompt challenging feelings and reactions. Depending on how you’re feeling, it may be beneficial to reach out, whether that be one on one or to a community.

- Contact counseling services if it would be helpful to discuss how you’re feeling after returning from your time abroad
- Connect with your campus’s career center to learn how to list your experience on your resume and/or discuss it in future job interviews or graduate school applications
- Reach out to your education abroad office to explore ways to engage with them or other students. Re-entry programming, peer advising roles, and internships are often available, which are all activities that you can add to your resume.
- Continue to improve your second language skills or explore a newfound interest by finding courses, faculty members, language partners, or clubs. Diversity and inclusion offices, your academic adviser, and community engagement departments are some of the offices that can help.
- Investigate Fulbright, Peace Corps, or other post-graduate programs that can help fund an international experience after you graduate.



## Reclaim Your Experience

As you continue to process your study abroad pandemic experience, translate what you’ve learned into skills and experiences to discuss with future employers. You’ve overcome and accomplished a significant amount.

Revisit the experiences you’ve already reflected on and prepare short stories. Begin by writing down specific examples of scenarios you navigated and what skills you gained or used. These unique stories can help you gain a competitive advantage in future job interviews.

- What were the ways in which you grew or changed as a person?
- What skills and personal qualities did you develop or use that you didn’t realize you had?
- How did this experience help you gain an understanding of your ability to navigate ambiguity, clarify your values, or improve your communication skills?



How could the skills you've acquired be applied to a professional setting in the future?

Use the “STAR” technique to communicate stories from your time abroad:



**Situation:** Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?



**Task:** Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?



**Action:** Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?



**Results:** Explain the results. Quantify accomplishments, recognitions, and skills. Highlight the **skills most important to employers**, such as problem-solving and analytical skills, the ability to work in a team, leadership and initiative, a strong work ethic, communication and interpersonal skills, flexibility/adaptability, and strategic planning.

*“The main thing I learned from this experience is that I am able to handle a crisis or otherwise stressful situation really well. I was able to shut out all extra background noise and go into a sort of calm that allowed me to problem solve to get me and my boyfriend home safely. This experience I had while studying abroad/returning home required an extreme level of flexibility and adaptability, and those are skills that I would not have forged as strongly without this experience.”*

— Marie, Austria



**Listen** to how other students have connected their experience abroad to their skills and future careers.



**Resume example:** On your resume, list your study abroad program, as well as any internship positions or other experiences you were not able to complete.

- XYZ Company—internship offer accepted; cancelled due to COVID-19. Spring 2020.