

**International Study Abroad:
Employers' View of Its Merits and Importances
in Recruiting**

A Brief Survey

Compiled by

**Collegiate Employment Research Institute
Career Services & Placement
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SUMMARY

Thirty-one (31) employers offered these insights on study abroad experiences of undergraduate students.

- Employers prefer overseas experiences of six months (semester) to a year abroad.
- Employers value total immersion programs or programs that involved the student to live within the host culture. Least preferred are programs led by U.S. faculty who teach the classes and act as tour guides.
- Employers expect students to gain social/cultural awareness and foreign language skills from their overseas study.
- Employers do not rate international study as important as other traditional criteria in the recruiting process. International study “rounds” a student.
- Employers expect international study to be more important to them over the next ten years.

INTERNATIONAL STUDY PROJECT

To determine how employers view international study programs that students are participating in on college campuses, a select group of companies were targeted for this inquiry. Companies were selected based on their expressed interest in international experience that was revealed: (1) in their response to Recruiting Trends 1996-97 survey; (2) in information obtained at the Minority Career Fair; and (3) in comments attached to surveys administered to the Eli Broad School of Business Advisory Board. Seventy-three (73) companies were identified and sent a personal invitation to answer a short survey on how they viewed international study. Thirty-one (31) or 42% provided a response.

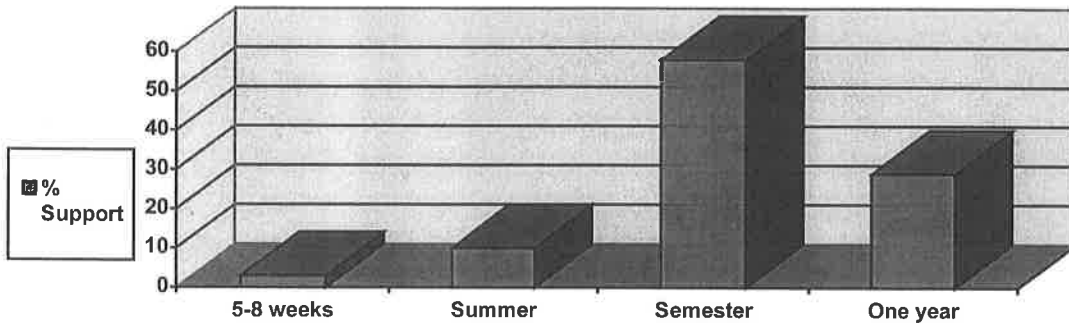
The survey contained six questions. Three questions pertained to the preferred characteristics of an international study experience (length and type) and the outcomes expected. Three additional questions sought to reveal how international experiences weighted against other considerations in the employers' evaluation of potential candidates. Following the profile of participating companies, the responses to the six questions are presented.

COMPANY PROFILE

Seventy-seven percent (77%) classified themselves as international companies; 16% national and 3% (1) local. Sixty-five percent have recruited at Michigan State University for an average of 15 years: 8 less than 10 years, 8 from 11 to 20 years, and 3 more than 20 years. The size of company ranged from 200 to 340,000 with all different sizes represented (salaried employees ranged from 15 to 185,000). Numerous sectors of the economy were represented by these companies: manufacturing, including automotive; retail; healthcare; hospitality; professional services; auditing/finance; telecommunications; and agricultural equipment and products.

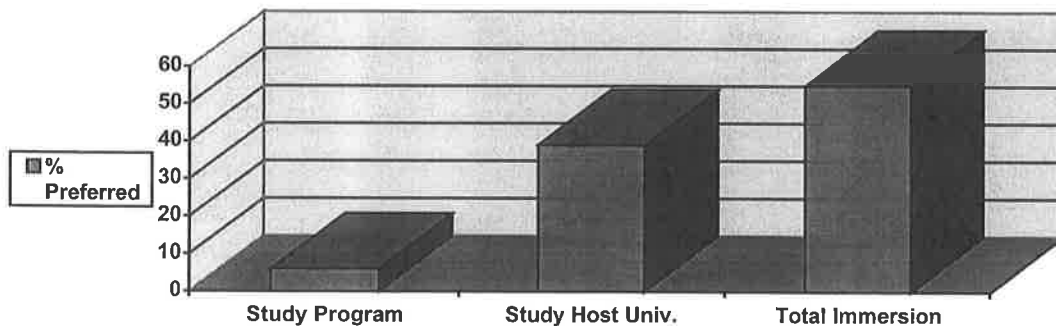
INTERNATIONAL STUDY OPTIONS

Length of Experience. Even though these employers recognized that a short overseas experience can be valuable, they preferred longer experiences, preferably one semester (58%) or one year (29%). A summer program of two to three months, including travel, was preferred over a five to eight week session.



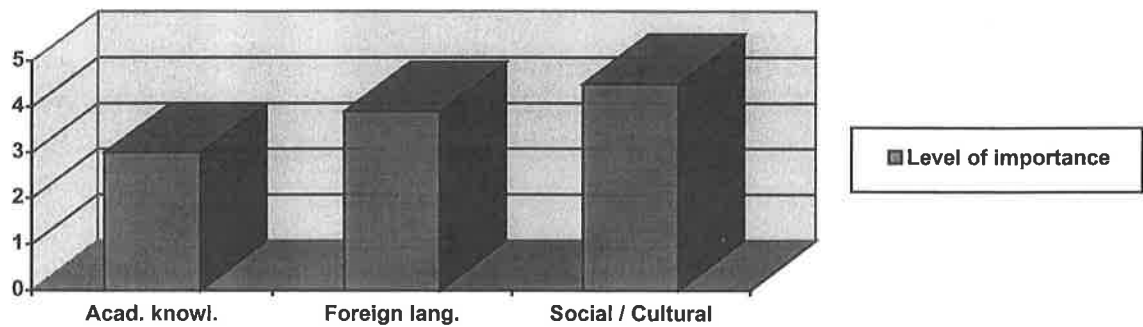
Length of Program

Type of Program. Employers believe that an overseas experience should require the student to adapt to another country's living conditions and their cultural norms. Thus, the programs they preferred involved (1) studying at host institution (only a few English courses) and living with host family or (2) total immersion where a student would live, work, and study in the native language. Several employers commented that it was important for students to gain work experiences in foreign environments for their overseas study to have a positive impact. Of the options presented, employers least preferred programs led by US faculty who taught the classes and acted as tour guides.



Type of Program

Expected Outcomes. Asked what they hoped students would gain from their experience, employers indicated social and cultural awareness/sensitivity as the most important, followed by gaining proficiency in a foreign language. Trailing at only “fairly important” was academic knowledge of the country (history, literature, music, economics, etc.). There appears to be only a modest connection between “academic learning” and cultural awareness. For several comments, employers expect study abroad programs to enhance the student’s discipline (marketing, engineering, public relations) through work and cultural awareness through the living situation.



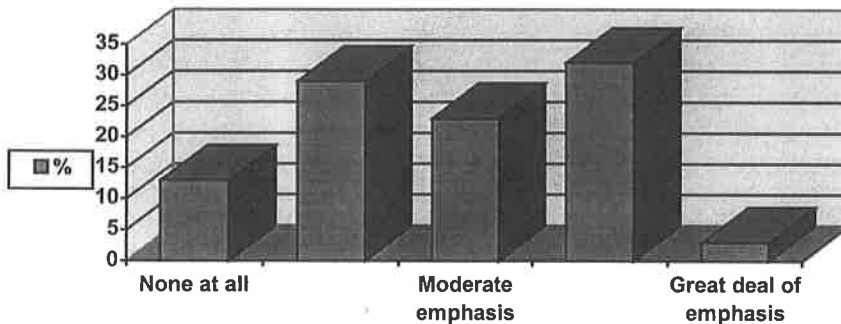
INTERNATIONAL STUDY AND EMPLOYMENT

How does an international study experience impact the student in the recruiting process? Employers were asked to rate the importance of selected factors that are commonly used in the evaluation of candidates. The purpose was to see how an international study experience stacked up against traditional factors. Slightly more than 50% rate it important - very important; 10% rated it not important. Several employers mentioned that international study was not a requirement for employment; they viewed the experience as “rounding out” the student. In other words, an international experience never hurts a student’s candidacy, as long as the critical employment dimensions are met.

Factors for Employment	Mean ¹	% Important - Very Important
Interpersonal communication skills	4.7	100%
Leadership	4.3	84%
Academic major	4.2	74%
Internship	4.2	84%
Summer employment	4.0	77%
Co-Op	3.9	67%
Grade point average	3.7	84%
Extracurricular activities	3.6	68%
International study	3.2	52%

¹Rated on a five-point scale: “1” - not at all important to “5” - very important.

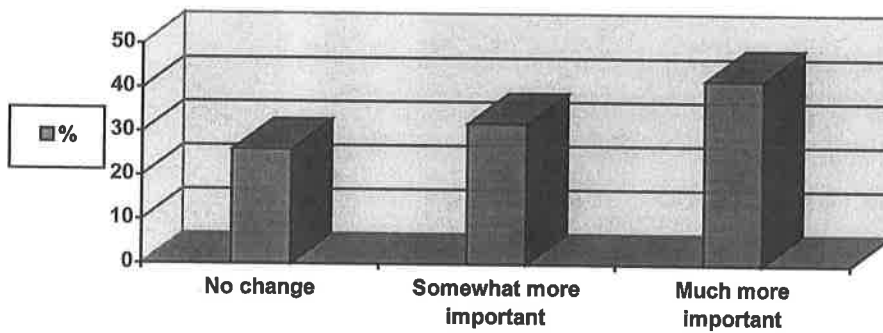
How much emphasis is currently given in your recruitment process to a candidate’s international experience?



Asked in a different format, the role of international experiences seem to be influx; even among employers who indicated to us that they valued international study before participating in this project.

Employers, however, did indicate that international experiences will gain in importance in the selection process over the next ten years: nearly 75%

Importance of International Experience in Selection Process



EMPLOYER COMMENTS

“It (international study) does make a difference. The person would have to have minimum qualifications first. After that, the overseas experience would give that person one up on someone who only has a U.S. based internship. It is something that would be looked upon highly. This would let us know that the person has a world wide perspective. We are getting more global. Also, later on in that person’s career, the international experience would help a lot.”

Jennifer Clark
Hewlett Packard Co.

“From a language perspective, yes; we are looking for people who have been immersed in another culture. The experience helps the person to learn the language better by providing a foundation for the language. Spanish and French are the two primary languages sought. Languages provide no edge for advancement unless the individual is qualified. The more skills and flexibility the person has the better; the more doors they will have open in their career.”

Gerald Schultz
Electronic Data Systems

“Company has become more global. Within 10 years, to make partner, new hires will need to work overseas for a period of time and know two languages. Applicants are given extra consideration if they have lived overseas for 3-6 months, especially those who have lived with a host family. Most of these grads are a little more mature; have better business sense. Applicants without this experience are not docked; but this experience does help.”

Laura Ladd
Deloitte & Touche