

# GLOBAL COMPETENCY

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The Michigan State "Recruiting Trends 2005-2006" report identified "geographic awareness and global understanding" as the primary "new competencies [for job seekers] critical to future success." The report notes that, "as businesses become realigned globally, having employees with an awareness of space..., social and cultural geographic movement, as well as dominant physical assets of a region will be critical to a company's vitality."

With global competency cited as the key to success in today's job market, it is important to identify your strengths in the context of your international awareness. This guide will help you take stock of your experience and understand how to translate these into tangible evidence of your competencies both on your cover letter and resume as well as during an interview.

## Global Competency: Some Definitions

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### Internationalist

- Excellent intercultural communication skills
- Learn through listening and observing
- Thrive in multicultural settings with a diverse range of personalities and learning styles
- Establish rapport quickly
- Able to work effectively as a part of a multinational/multicultural team
- Effective and knowledgeable in working in cross-cultural settings
- Learn quickly

### Comfort with Dissonance

- Capacity to adapt and be flexible in new and changing situations
- Handle difficult situations
- Extremely adaptable and resourceful in new and challenging environments
- Function well in multiple, dissonant environments
- Capable of working in difficult and ambiguous settings

### Multicultural Leadership

- Effective and cooperative team player who also works well independently
- Take initiative and risks
- Communicate despite barriers
- Understand cultural differences and similarities
- Handle stress
- Identify problems and utilize available resources to resolve them

## What Skills Do Globally Competent Graduates Possess?

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Initiative                         | • Independence                      |
| • Enthusiasm                         | • Appreciation of Diversity         |
| • Inquisitiveness                    | • Perseverance                      |
| • Interest in continuous learning    | • Creativity                        |
| • Courage                            | • Flexibility                       |
| • Self-reliance                      | • Comfort with uncertainty          |
| • Self-confidence                    | • Open-mindedness                   |
| • Cultural awareness and sensitivity | • Language and communication skills |
| • Self-knowledge                     | • Assertiveness                     |
| • Positive outlook toward adversity  | • Sense of humor                    |

## Transferable Skills

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Transferable skills are skills that are not limited to any one academic discipline or field but are transferable to many occupations. These are the skills sought after most by employers and include the global competencies listed in the previous section. Consider how your study or work abroad experience has developed or strengthened particular skills and attitudes. Reflect on your time overseas, what you learned from the experience and how it changed you.

Carefully read the job description for your desired position: what specific skills are mentioned and what can you pull from your study abroad experience to strengthen your case? Make a list of your transferable skills and the job qualifications, and then match them up, being sure to highlight these in your resume, cover letter and interview.

## Identifying Your International Competencies

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The following list of questions is intended to help you *begin to identify* some of the international knowledge, skills and experience you possess.

### Language and Communication Skills:

- What languages do you speak? Write? Understand?
- In what languages are you fluent?
- Do you have a professional network (i.e. professional contacts) in other countries?
- Do you have an ear for understanding different accents?
- Are you able to recognize different meanings in gesturing from more than one culture? For example, hand waves and head nods can mean vastly different things from one culture to the next.
- Do you understand slang words in more than one language or dialect?

### Knowledge of Culture, Both Traditional and Popular:

- With what cultures and nationalities have you had close dealings?
- What ethnic or religious traditions do you observe?
- Are you familiar with the nuances of ethnic or religious traditions beyond your own?
- Can you cook traditional or popular dishes associated with your country or culture?
- Are you closely familiar with specific cultural, religious or national festivals and their significance?
- Can you identify traditional and/or contemporary forms of art from multiple countries?
- Are you familiar with social trends in other countries (i.e. what's popular in music, fashion, movies, etc.)?
- Do you use, or are you familiar with, technologies or gadgets that are currently popular in other countries?
- Do you know of websites that are popular in other countries?

### Knowledge of Business and Employment Practices:

- Are you familiar with the predominant management styles in more than one country? Can you articulate differences and similarities of these styles?
- Are you familiar with labor standards and/or hiring practices in other countries?
- Are you aware of specific labor laws from other countries?

### Education:

- In how many countries have you studied?
- Are you able to articulate the similarities and differences in educational systems with which you are familiar?
- Have you observed a noticeable difference in teaching and/or learning styles in different countries?

### Ability to Adapt:

- How many countries have you visited? Lived in? Worked or volunteered in?
- Do you adjust quickly to new surroundings?
- When faced with a new environment, do you fit in quickly?
- Are you comfortable using public transportation in multiple countries?

### Global Thinking Skills:

- Do you follow the news from multiple countries on a regular basis?
- When news happens in one country, do you often think of its implications on other countries?
- Can you clearly describe the political parties from at least one other country?
- Do you know how to access social services in another country?
- Have you participated in providing humanitarian aid in another country?

## From Thoughts to Paper: Capturing Your Global Competency in a Resume

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Regardless of your career goals include details about your intercultural experience, language abilities, work experience with international organizations, volunteer work/research abroad, or coursework with international/global aspects. An international or study abroad experience demonstrates adaptability and flexibility, motivation to explore outside of the “comfort zone”, assuming responsibility for one’s own experiences and success, the ability to communicate in foreign environments, interest or skill in intercultural competency, the ability to handle stress in the unknown situation, open-mindedness, self-reliance and self-confidence.

When including study or work abroad in your resume, think about the skills you gained and what you learned. Remember that you must make the connection to the actual skills you gained through the experiences you had—it won’t always be obvious to an employer.

### To effectively present an international experience on your resume, ask yourself the following questions:

- What am I trying to communicate to a potential employer about my international experience? About its relationship to my major?
- What skills did I gain? What cross-cultural competencies did I develop? Did I become proficient in a language?
- Where should I include this experience on my resume so that it will have the most impact and support what I am trying to communicate?
- Did I gain research experience through conducting an independent study project? Have I become well versed in some aspect of my host country’s culture?

### Emphasize your international experiences by:

- Making sure your study abroad experience stands out and is identified as part of the “Education” section.
- Highlighting the subjects you studied while abroad, the place where you studied, the grades you received, and the amount of time you were there.
- Focusing on your accomplishments and skills. Your resume should focus on the “results” of your study abroad experience, not simply where you went or what you did.
- If you completed an internship abroad, make sure to give this experience its own space and detail, especially if it was language intensive or provided practical work experience in your academic major. This could be located in a “Relevant Experience” section of your resume or under “Education,” separated from but associated with your study abroad program.
- If you are applying for a position that involves travel or significant work with overseas offices or customers, you may want to list the countries you visited. If you only traveled to a few countries then you may want to omit this, but if you have traveled to more than 10 countries, you may want to add a “Countries Visited” section. This will demonstrate that you have been exposed to a variety of cultures and that you are well-traveled, suggesting you will require less preparation and hand-holding when it comes to this part of the job. This also reflects an interest in travel, adventure, self-reliance, and heightened cross-cultural sensitivity. Don’t list countries you only spent a day or two in, only those where you really spent some time and could discuss them in an interview or conversation.

### Sample Resume Entry

#### EDUCATION

**Binghamton University, State University of New York**  
**Bachelor of Arts, expected May 2010**

Major: Linguistics, Arabic      Minor: Global Studies

**Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco**

Intensive Arabic Language Program, summer 2008

#### CROSS-CULTURAL CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

English Conversation Pairs, Program Assistant and Participant, fall 2007 – present

Native Speaking Assistant, University ESL Class, spring 2008

Binghamton University Globalistas (BUGs), Undergraduate Student Representative, fall 2008-present

#### FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Working Proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic

Familiar with Moroccan Dialect

## **From Thoughts to Paper: Presenting Your Global Competency in a Cover Letter**

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The goal of a cover letter is to motivate the recipient to review your resume and ultimately invite you for an interview. Your cover letter is your opportunity to highlight to your prospective employer what sets you apart from other candidates. As you construct a letter of application consider how your cross-cultural experiences have helped you develop and/or strengthen the skills and competencies required for this specific position. How might your international experience uniquely benefit you in this role as well as the organization? Even if you are not focusing on a specific international position or organization, you can promote general transferable skills, such as independence, confidence, and problem solving.

## **From Thoughts to Words: Articulating Your Global Competency in an Interview**

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You can and should always find a relevant way to incorporate your study abroad experience into an interview. In many ways this sets you apart from your peers, bringing a different skill set and outlook to a potential employer. As a study abroad returnee, you have gained a tremendous amount of transferable skills during your study abroad experience. These may seem general to you and go overlooked or unmentioned in an interview, but they can almost always connect in some way to any job description.

### **Think of examples related to your experiences abroad that have demonstrated your ability to:**

- Creatively solve problems by applying familiar concepts to unfamiliar situations
- Be self-confident, yet able to listen and learn from people whose value systems are different
- Take personal risks and act independently
- Be flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing situations
- Have a basic command of the local language, and be able use it in practical situations
- Imagine, forecast, analyze or address business situations from a different cultural frame of reference.

### **Sample Interview Questions: Directly Related to Study Abroad**

Employers are looking for specific examples of ways in which you bettered your communication skills, adaptability to new circumstances, flexibility and cultural awareness. Think of a specific story as related to your overseas experience that best highlights your newly acquired skills.

- **Why did you choose to study abroad?**
- **Why and how did you choose your study abroad program and location?**
- **How did study abroad change you? How will this be helpful to you in the future?**
- **Tell me about your volunteer and work experience while abroad.**
- **What did you learn overseas that would help you in this job?**
- **In what ways are you more adaptable, open-minded and observant?**
- **Describe your role of working with students from different cultural backgrounds.**
- **Tell me how you immersed yourself in an unfamiliar environment.**
- **Can you identify cultural differences? Can you identify a specific time when you needed to modify your behavior to accommodate cultural norms?**

### **Sample Interview Questions: Indirectly Related to Study Abroad**

These questions do not explicitly ask about your experience abroad. Regardless, use these opportunities to highlight examples of problem solving and analytical skills in new and unfamiliar environments.

- **Tell me something interesting about yourself.**
- **Tell me about your most challenging situation while in college and how you handled the situation.**
- **Tell me about a time when you took a risk. What did you gain or lose from the risk?**
- **By giving an example, what role do you typically play on teams?**
- **Tell me about a time when you had to think on your feet to come to a decision quickly.**
- **Tell me about an interpersonal conflict you had with someone. How did you deal with this conflict?**
- **Name an accomplishment that has given you the most satisfaction. Why?**

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### **Sources:**

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5. Packaging Your International Experience, by Kimberly Larsson, published in *Abroad View* fall 2008