

# **Student Handbook: Re-Entry**

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**Office of International Education  
Peralta Community College District**

A handbook administered by the Office of International Education (OIE)  
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## **A Message from the Office of International Education**

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At Peralta Community College District our mission is to promote student success, provide our diverse community with educational opportunities, and to transform lives. We strive to educate students that become active community members and global citizens. One way to achieve this goal is to encourage our students to seek study abroad opportunities. Each year over 300,000 U.S. students study abroad. And with an increasingly interconnected globalized world, international education has never been more important than it is now. The Office of International Education has designed this Study Abroad Handbook to assist its students in achieving an international education that will result in the knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare them for personal, professional and academic success.

## How to Use This Handbook

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Welcome home! You have seized an opportunity to leave all familiarity behind and venture abroad; making you a part of 1% of all U.S. college students that study abroad. It's important to recognize this great achievement and celebrate your accomplishment! We have compiled this handbook for you to utilize during your transition back home. It is equipped with resources that will help to unpack-reflect, articulate and integrate- your experiences.

The goal of re-entry is to:

1. Encourage deeper engagement and understanding of the study abroad experience
2. Assist you in articulating your experience in a meaningful way
3. Help guide you to apply experience to lives in multiple ways

Remember, it is up to you to make international education an integral part of your daily personal, academic and professional lives!

**Consider This:** *Please consider meeting with the OIE to share about your study abroad program. Your experience is the best way to help other PCCD Students go abroad. The International Services Manager, Drew Gephart, can be contacted at the Office of International Education at (510) 587-7834 or [dgephart@peralta.edu](mailto:dgephart@peralta.edu).*

## What is Re-Entry?

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At this moment you may be facing an adjustment period with mixed emotions- excited to share your journey while attempting to immerse into your primary culture at home. You may have developed during your time abroad and your family and friends may have undergone growth at home. Perhaps you are nervous about sharing your stories since you are the first in your family to go abroad. Navigating this time as you return home may be confusing. This is a normal stage of returning home from a trip abroad called **re-entry**.

*“Re-entry is the experience of returning to a place you once called home, whether country, city, community, family, work place or even house. It's the physical, mental, and emotional transition from living or traveling abroad back to the place you once lived.. Reentry is about going “home”, but it's also about redefining home. It's about getting to know the new you, deciding on your best next steps, and carving out a global life path that is perfect for you.”*

- Dr. Cate Brubaker [The Reentry Roadmap](#)

# Personal and Emotional Preparation

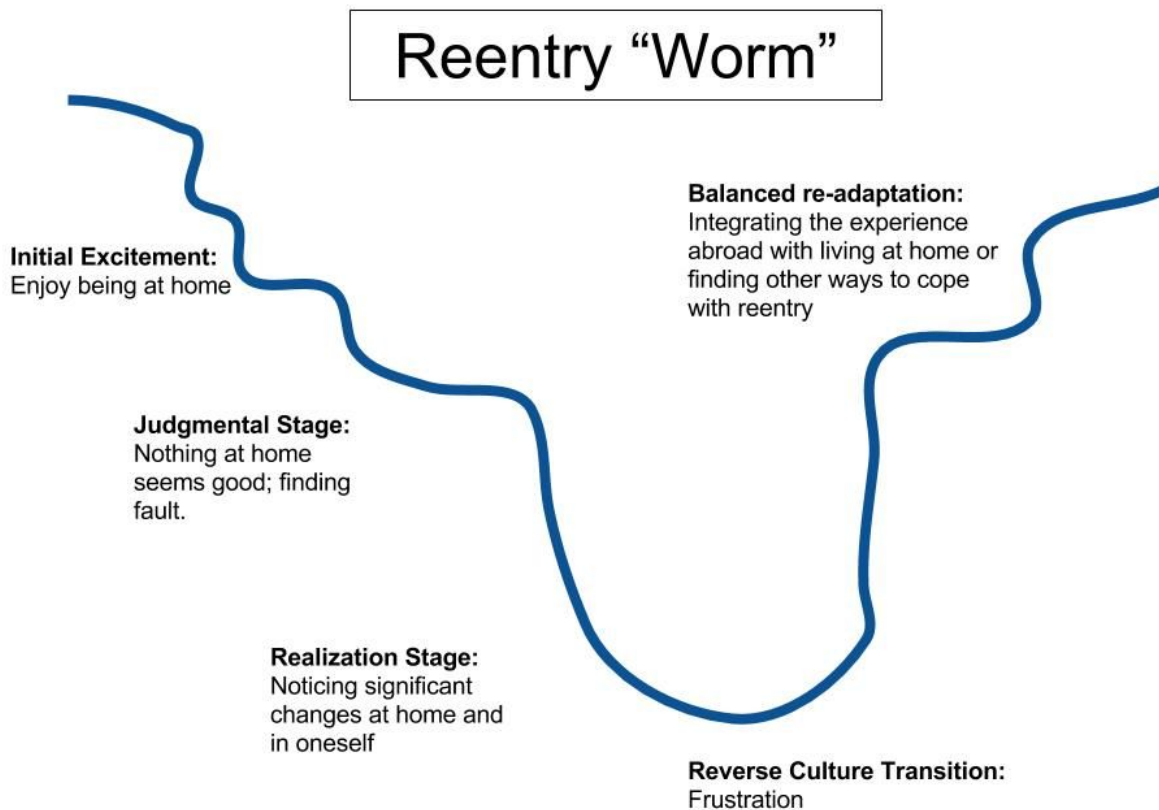
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You may be eager to immediately jump back into your daily routine. Nonetheless, preparation is key for a healthy return. Reading and participating in the activities will provide adequate readiness. We suggest you review these considerations on the plane or within the first few days of return.

## REENTRY WORM

*Adapted from the Reentry "Worm" adapted from Margaret D. Pusch, 1997*

This model outlines common stages of emotions you *may* experience during reentry, but is not a "one-size-fits all" model. Due to diversity in students, program lengths, models and locations, reentry can feel different for everyone. If you ever feel overwhelmed or lost during your re-entry process we strongly suggest you to speak with a PCCD personal counselor for tailored advice specific to your unique journey.



© Margaret D. Pusch, 1997

## TEN TOP IMMEDIATE REENTRY CHALLENGES

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There are lots of reasons to look forward to going home, but there are also a number of psychological, social, and cultural aspects which can prove difficult, often because they are unanticipated. The following list was generated by interviewing students like you who have been through the experience and survived nicely. However, they say you should take the process seriously by being realistic and thinking about it and your possible reactions. They offer the following thoughts on reentry for your consideration in the hope they will make your return both more enjoyable and more productive.

1. **BOREDOM:** After all the newness and stimulation of your time abroad, a return to family, friends, and old routines (however nice and comforting) can seem very dull. It is natural to miss the excitement and challenges which characterize study in a foreign country, but it is up to you to find ways to overcome such negative reactions...remember a bored person is also boring.
2. **"NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR":** One thing you can count on upon your return: no one will be as interested in hearing about your adventures and triumphs as you will be in sharing those experiences. This is not a rejection of you or your achievements, but simply the fact that once they have heard the highlights, any further interest on your audience's part is probably unlikely. Be realistic in your expectations of how fascinating your journey is going to be for everyone else. Be brief.
3. **YOU CAN'T EXPLAIN:** Even when given a chance to explain all the sights you saw and feelings you had while studying abroad, it is likely to be at least a bit frustrating to relay them coherently. It is very difficult to convey this kind of experience to people who do not have similar frames of reference or travel backgrounds, no matter how sympathetic they are as listeners. You can tell people about your trip, but you may fail to make them understand exactly how or why you felt a particular way. It's okay.
4. **REVERSE "HOMESICKNESS":** Just as you probably missed home for a time after arriving overseas, it is just as natural to experience some reverse homesickness for the people, places, and things that you grew accustomed to as a student overseas. To an extent it can be reduced by writing letters, telephoning, and generally keeping in contact, but feelings of loss are an integral part of international sojourns and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural result of study abroad.
5. **RELATIONSHIPS HAVE CHANGED:** It is inevitable that when you return you will notice that some relationships with friends and family will have changed. Just as you have altered some of your ideas and attitudes while abroad, the people at home are likely to have experienced some changes. These changes may be positive or negative, but expecting that no change will have occurred is unrealistic. The best preparation is flexibility, openness, minimal preconceptions, and tempered optimism.

6. **PEOPLE SEE "WRONG" CHANGES:** Sometimes people may concentrate on small alterations in your behavior or ideas and seem threatened or upset by them. Others may ascribe "bad" traits to the influence of your time abroad. These incidents may be motivated by jealousy, fear, or feelings of superiority or inferiority. To avoid or minimize them it is necessary to monitor yourself and be aware of the reactions of those around you, especially in the first few weeks following your return. This phase normally passes quickly if you do nothing to confirm their stereotypes.
7. **PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND:** A few people will misinterpret your words or actions in such a way that communication is difficult. For example, what you may have come to think of as humor (particularly sarcasm, banter, etc.) and ways to show affection or establish conversation may not be seen as wit, but aggression or "showing off." Conversely, a silence that was seen as simply polite overseas might be interpreted at home, incorrectly, as signaling agreement or opposition. New clothing styles or mannerisms may be viewed as provocative, inappropriate, or as an affectation. Continually using references to foreign places or sprinkling foreign language expressions or words into an English conversation is often considered boasting. Be aware of how you may look to others and how your behavior is likely to be interpreted.
8. **FEELINGS OF ALIENATION:** Sometimes the reality of being back "home" is not as natural or enjoyable as the place you had constructed as your mental image. When real daily life is less enjoyable or more demanding than you remembered, it is natural to feel some alienation. Many returnees develop "critical eyes", a tendency to see faults in the society you never noticed before. Some even become quite critical of everyone and everything for a time. This is no different than when you first left home. Mental comparisons are fine, but keep them to yourself until you regain both your cultural balance and a balanced perspective.
9. **INABILITY TO APPLY NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS:** Many returnees are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to apply newly gained social, technical, linguistic, and practical coping skills that appear to be unnecessary or irrelevant at home. To avoid ongoing annoyance: adjust to reality as necessary, change what is possible, be creative, be patient, and above all use the cross-cultural adjustment skills you acquired abroad to assist your own reentry.
10. **LOSS/COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF EXPERIENCE (SHOEBOXING):** Being home, coupled with the pressures of job, family, and friends, often combine to make returnees worried that somehow they will "lose" the experience. Many fear that it will somehow become compartmentalized like souvenirs or photo albums kept in a box and only occasionally taken out and looked at. You do not have to let that happen: maintain your contacts abroad; seek out and talk to people who have had experiences similar to yours; practice your cross-cultural skills; continue language learning. Remember and honor both your hard work and the fun you had while abroad.

## TIPS TO EASE RE-ENTRY PROCESS

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- **Prepare for an adjustment process.** The more you consider your alternatives, think about what is to come, and know about how returning home is both similar to and different from going abroad, the easier the transition will be. Anticipating is useful. As one psychologist put it, "Worrying helps."
- **Allow yourself time.** Re-entry is a process that will take time, just like adjusting to a new foreign culture. Give yourself time to relax and reflect upon what is going on around you, how you are reacting to it, and what you might like to change. Give yourself permission to ease into the transition.
- **Understand that the familiar will seem different.** You will have changed, home has changed, and you will be seeing familiar people, places, and behaviors from new perspectives. Some things will seem strange, perhaps even unsettling. Expect to have some new emotional and psychological reactions to being home. Everyone does.
- **There will be much "cultural catching up" to do.** Some linguistic, social, political, economic, entertainment and current event topics will be unfamiliar to you as new programs, slang, and even governmental forms may have emerged since you left. You may have some learning to do about your own culture. (Note: most returnees report that major insights into themselves and their home countries occur during re-entry).
- **Reserve judgments.** Just as you had to keep an open mind when first encountering the culture of a new foreign country, try to resist the natural impulse to make snap decisions and judgments about people and behaviors once back home. Mood swings are common at first and your most valuable and valid analysis of events is likely to take place after allowing some time for thorough reflection.
- **Respond thoughtfully and slowly.** Quick answers and impulsive reactions often characterize returnees. Frustration, disorientation, and boredom in the returnee can lead to behavior that is incomprehensible to family and friends. Take some time to rehearse what you want to say and how you will respond to predictable questions and situations; prepare to greet those that are less predictable with a calm, thoughtful approach.
- **Cultivate sensibility.** Showing an interest in what others have been doing while you have been on your adventure overseas is the surest way to re-establish rapport. Much frustration in returnees stems from what is perceived as disinterest by others in their experience and lack of opportunity to express their feelings and tell their stories. Being as good a listener as a talker is a key ingredient in mutual sharing.



- **Beware of comparisons.** Making comparisons between cultures and nations is natural, particularly after residence abroad; however, a person must be careful not to be seen as too critical of home or too lavish in praise of things foreign. A balance of good and bad features is probably more accurate and certainly less threatening to others. The tendency to be an "instant expert" is to be avoided at all costs.

- **Remain flexible.** Keeping as many options open as possible is an essential aspect of a successful return home. Attempting to re-socialize totally into old patterns and networks can be difficult, but remaining aloof is isolating and counterproductive. What you want to achieve is a balance between maintaining earlier patterns and enhancing your social and intellectual life with new friends and interests.

- **Seek support networks.** There are lots of people back home who have gone through their own re-entry and understand a returnees concerns — academic faculty, exchange students, international development staff, diplomatic corps, military personnel, church officials, and businessmen and women.

## 9 QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

*Adapted from A Thoughtful Return from the book Maximizing Study Abroad (2004) Most of the following questions were adapted and cited from A Thoughtful Return, Maximizing Study Abroad, Student Handbook pp. 141-142. University of Minnesota*

Below are 9 questions to help begin thinking about the sharing and engaging process. Writing the answers down will help articulate your experiences later on, but even thinking about these answers will be beneficial.

1. In what ways might my friends or family have changed?
2. How would I like my family and friends to treat me when I return home?
3. What am I looking forward to the most?
4. What are the lessons I have learned that I never want to forget?
5. What are some skills I have learned?
6. Many say that the experience of re-entry is more challenging than your initial move to another place. What are some things I might do to make the transition easier?
7. What have been the important things about this experience that I want to share with my family and friends?
8. Who would be most interested in hearing about my experiences?
9. What do I want to do with the experiences I've had (e.g., stay in touch with people I've met, continue with a new interest)? Why?

## Reflect

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Reflection during each stage of study abroad is important. This is especially true during reentry. Below are four options of activities to guide your reflection. These activities will be useful when it comes time for you to engage.

**Option 1- Write down 5 important events you gained from study abroad and the matching skills you gained from them.** Think deeply and be sure to add just a variety of events-even if they weren't positive at the time!

<b>Event:</b> ex) Dinner every night at host family's home, challenge to keep engaged in daily dialogue.	<b>Skill:</b> ex) Improved communication skills

**Option 2- Soundbyting:** Reflecting on your study abroad experience

Note your top memory in each area.

<b>Biggest Cultural Mistake:</b>
<b>Funniest Moments:</b>
<b>Scariest Experience:</b>
<b>Most Thrilling Memory:</b>
<b>Most Moving Experience:</b>
<b>An Important Relationship:</b>
<b>A Trip I Took:</b>
<b>Other:</b>

**Choose One Memory and Give the Highlights.** Focusing on one memory above write down the top 3-4 or points you want to make.

1.	2.
3.	4.

**Summarize and Generalize.** Summarize and generalize about the experience. Explain what you took away from the experience and what you learned about yourself, human nature, and/or interacting across cultures.

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**Option 3- STAR Method**

Situation or Task

**Describe a situation you experienced or a task that you needed to accomplish while you were abroad.**

1. Describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description. Provide enough detail for your listener to understand.

*E.g. There was a train strike and my roommates and I were stranded in a town about 3 hours from where we were studying abroad. It was Sunday night and we had class at 9 am Monday.*

**Action**

Describe the action you took -keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team.

*Ex. I checked train schedules for the morning, but realized we wouldn't get back in time for classes, and we didn't know if trains would be running. Then we went to bus station to see if there were buses that would take us back, or closer, to our town.*

**Results**

What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

*Ex. I found a bus that would take us to a nearby town that I had visited before and I knew we could take a taxi to a metro that would get us get back to the city center where we lived. My roommates were nervous, but I knew we could make it back. And we did!*

**Option 4- Action Plan.** Complete the following action plan with your personal goals.

PERSONAL/EMOTIONAL PROCESS PLAN: I plan to do the following in order to prepare for and deal with the personal/emotional stress I may face upon my return to home...

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: I plan to do the following in order to contribute to positive social change on my campus or home community through engagement in my home community and/or continued involvement with my host country or region...

ACADEMIC REINTEGRATION: I plan to do the following in order to actively integrate my new knowledge, interests and skills into my university experience...

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: I plan to do the following in order to incorporate my new skills and interests into my professional path...

## Share and Engage

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### Personal

Integrating your international experience into your personal life can happen in various ways. You can share your memories with family and friends, or incorporate it into your daily life. Here are actions you can take to share and engage in a personal way.

- Create meaningful ways to share your journey.
  - Vlog or Blog
  - Facebook Page
  - Slideshow
  - Scrapbook
  - Eat at restaurants with the cuisine from the host country and bring friends along with you- this way you are introducing new people to the culture
- Get involved with the International Office at PCCD. Your experience can inspire others and becoming a campus leader will be a fantastic additive to your resume.
  - Volunteer for their Study Abroad Fair
  - Create a Peer-Mentor group and advise others interested PCCD students
  - Start a study abroad alumni group within PCCD
  - Connect with the International Students at PCCD through activities sponsored by the Office of International Education
- Join a club that has similar interests ie) multicultural club, student leadership etc.
- Link your experiences in the host country to political and social action in the place where you study or live
- Volunteer or work for:
  - NGOs and local or national movements.
  - Immigrants communities from the host country
- Determine whether community service activities you've carried out during the program can be applied to your home community and look into continuing these types of activities at home.
- Publish stories or articles about your study abroad experience in community media sources
- Write an article for your local newspaper or college paper about how your experience abroad helped you gain global understanding about a particular global issue. What is your perspective about a social issue having lived abroad?
- Find a language partner

## Academic

Coming back home usually involves new passions for knowledge that puts your study abroad learning into a larger framework or follows up on paths opened up during study abroad. The key to academic reintegration is finding ways to actively integrate your new knowledge, interests and skills into your PCCD and future educational experience. This section will get you going on integrating your new experiences into your academic life.

- Identify professors you can work or communicate with regarding their areas of interest. ie) Becoming a African American Studies teaching assistant
- Determine how your independent study can be incorporated into the university curriculum through campus presentations and other campus work
  - Think about ways you can expand on your international experience through other coursework
- Complete university assignments or research connected to the host country and program-related topics of interest (where possible)
- Consider adding a supplementary program that relates to you global education
  - Meet with your academic counselor to discuss your plan before making any changes

## Professional

**“The three most important skills [employers look for in a job applicant] were cognitive skills, social skills, and ‘personal traits.’ Problem-solving ability, decision-making, and knowing how to learn are highly prized cognitive skills. Social skills were described as the ability to work effectively in group settings, particularly with diverse populations. Personal traits mentioned frequently included flexibility, adaptability, and the capacity to be innovative.”**

*NAFSA’S Guide to Education Abroad, pg. 103.*

A huge reason many PCCD students go abroad is to gain practical professional skills. Now that you have returned from your journey, you should consider how you’re going to articulate your professional growth. The following activities and tips will help you in this process. Be sure to use your information from the reflection activities. Once you have completed, please make an appointment with your career counselor during the semester to review.

## Guided Reflection: Professional Goals

Answer the following questions:

- ❑ What did I accomplish while abroad?

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What did I learn about myself and my learning/working style?

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What does this experience mean for my future?

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What skills may I have picked up while travelling abroad?

- Self-Awareness, Empathy, Cross Cultural Communication, Intercultural Competence, Independence, Flexibility/Adaptability, etc.

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Do I want to go abroad again after graduation? Why or why not?

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## Articulate Skills Developed Abroad

### Skills and Abilities Associated with Study Abroad

*Study abroad returnees often struggle with expressing the impact of their experience beyond a generic exclamation of "It changed my life!" Reference the table below for some possible skills and abilities commonly associated with study abroad.*

Understand cultural similarities and differences	Handle stress and difficult situations
Ask thoughtful questions	Organize and prioritize work
Learn through listening and observation	Lead others in formal/informal groups
Establish rapport with people from diverse backgrounds	Conduct research despite language and cultural differences
Adapt to changing circumstances	Cope with rejection
Manage ambiguity comfortably	Take ownership of projects
Make smooth "transitions"	Work independently
Take initiative	Use an open-minded approach
Take risks	Asserting oneself
Manage time amidst competing demands	Taking action with confidence
Accept responsibility	Establishing clear-cut goals and objectives
Offer creative ideas and solutions	Seek achievement
Seek continuous learning opportunities	Respond to hardship and adversity with a positive outlook
Communicate despite barriers	Make efficient use of resources
Learn quickly	Establish relationships across cultural and societal differences

### **Setting Career Goals:**

Studies show that setting goals helps people hold themselves accountable and make positive progress towards those goals. It is good practice to write down and develop career goals. Even if these goals change later, a working draft of your career goals will be an invaluable tool in helping you navigate your return from abroad. Here are some simple tips to help guide your reflection:

- Share your career goals with friends, family, professors, advisors, and potential employers. Utilizing your network can help you hunt for possible job opportunities which you might not otherwise hear about.
- Maintain your overseas connections! Don't let the connections you made while abroad fizzle out because they might lead to potential employment later down the line.
- Visit PCCD career center to get help identifying possible overseas or U.S. companies you might be interested in working for.
- Reach out to alumni currently based abroad. They will be an invaluable resource.
- Refine your international elevator pitch.
- Narrow your field of options (where do you want to work, in what sector, speaking what language, what jobs do you NOT want?)
- Consider further international education experience (Volunteer in Office of International Education, alumni advisor, etc...)

## Self-Marketing Approaches

### *Describing International Experiences in your Application Materials*

Incorporating your study abroad experience and details about what you learned can be a great addition to self-marketing approaches. Remember that employers see the most value in study abroad experiences through the relevant connections you make to their role, organization or industry area.

### Resumes

Study abroad experiences are most often included within the education section of a resume, following your formal degree name.

*For example:*

<b>Education</b>	
Merritt College Associate Degree Nursing	August 2014 - May 2016 Oakland, CA
IES Abroad Cape Town Summer Health Studies Program	August 2015 Cape Town, South Africa
<b>OR</b>	
<b>Experience</b>	
IES Abroad Cape Town Summer Health Studies Program -Engaged in local culture by developing and administering a health survey -Studied local medicine and the historic cultural roots -Shadowed doctors practicing modern medicine	August 2015 Cape Town, South Africa

### Cover Letters

Cover letters provide the opportunity to describe how and why an experience has prepared you for the role, industry or organization you are targeting. Consider your study abroad reflections and how you wish to market your experiences for employers.

Providing *specific examples* is one of the most effective ways to make your cover letter stand out. Listing skills without examples is often less memorable for employers (reading more like a list than as specific experiences). Incorporating details from study abroad experiences can be a great way to provide examples and a context for the skills and/or experiences you describe.

### Personal Statements

Like cover letters, personal statements provide the opportunity to describe how and why an experience has prepared you for course of study, a specific university or career that you are targeting application. As you consider your own research interests, career goals, or the skills you will bring, think about if your study abroad experience influenced your decision-making? If so, how could you communicate this impact using specific examples?

### Interviews

*To highlight your study abroad experience, you should certainly be ready to answer the question:*

**“In what ways will your experience abroad add value to the school or company?”**

Effective self-marketing means that you are actively *incorporating important details and examples about your skills and experiences into your interview responses*. You do not need to wait for an employer to ask about your studying abroad to incorporate and highlight the skills and knowledge you developed from your experience in your answers to interview questions.

If you would like to discuss marketing your international experiences with a career counselor, contact your campus office.

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