

# Working Abroad



## Getting started

- Why do you want to go abroad?
- Where do you want to go?
- Which is more important to you: where you go or what you do?
- What skills do you realistically possess?: Skill in the target country language is not enough!
- How important is money?
- How hard are you really willing to work at this?
- Are you just avoiding reality?
- What will you do when you return from being abroad?
- How will you describe this experience to employers?

## What are employers looking for?

According to a joint study between the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the RAND Corporation, the global marketplace requires certain skills, which employers described as:

- Domain knowledge (subject expertise)
- Cognitive, social and personal skills
- Prior work experience
- Cross-cultural experience

## Issues to consider

- Language skills: Students are quick to overestimate their language skills. The level of their language ability is the best predictor of their success in a work abroad situation. Students should get realistic appraisals of their language ability. The type of job (e.g. "casual" work in restaurants and offices vs. more "professional") is inversely related to language ability. The more "casual" the environment, the more people contact and often the more language skill needed.
- Work visas: "Cultural exchange" status is often available for six months to one year post-graduation.
- Internships vs. casual work: In other countries, internships are often considered a service to the student (as a way for them to get experience and training) and are, consequently, unpaid or very low paying. Usually these internships must be related to academic credit. Casual work is usually better paid and easier to get.
- Work vs. study abroad
- Timing: Usually a student must complete three years of school to be competitive for internships. Casual work can be attained earlier. US students usually have more work experience than students from other countries.
- Safety issues: Because work experiences are often more independent than study experiences, a student becomes more responsible for his/her own safety. Going abroad through a program makes the safety issue easier to tackle. In case of security issues, most organized programs will require participants to purchase medical/traveler's insurance, which includes evacuation and repatriation insurance. The International Student ID Card (ISIC) provides this insurance. [www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org) has lots of resources on student safety.

## Costs and financing work abroad

- Salary: Students should be wary of the salaries offered. For example, BUNAC (which places students in casual work experiences) is very conservative in its advice to students regarding salaries to help keep students from being exploited.
- Travel expenses: Students usually pay their own travel expenses, except when teaching English abroad, in which case the employing program or school usually pays.
- Program fees: Most programs have some fees. The more fees, usually the more services offered.
- Start-up expenses: Students should be prepared to bring with them enough money to cover at least a month worth of expenses to take into account the time it might take to find a position or get paid for the first time.
- Financial assistance: Financial aid may apply for students getting academic credit for their work/internship experience.

## Types of work programs

### Work permit programs

For these very flexible programs, students do not have to have a job prearranged before arriving in the host country (all other types of visas do require this). A student can do any kind of job a regular citizen of the host country can do. Often these programs have staffed offices in the major cities of participating countries that provide help to program participants. Usually participants find very casual work (e.g. pub or temporary office job). The application process for these programs can be as short as one month to complete all the paperwork, so they make good last-minute options. Students usually rent their own apartments while participating in these programs, although sometimes they can coordinate through local universities to arrange housing. Subcultures of program participants form which share and pass on information, belongings and apartments from outgoing participants to incoming participants. Some of the biggest programs are:

- BUNAC (British University North American Clubs) (<http://www.bunac.org/usa/>): More than 10,000 students have participated in this program during its more than 46-year duration. Work in Canada, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand; intern in Britain, Ecuador, Valencia and Shanghai. Teach (as intern) in China and Thailand.
- IASTE, AIPT, CDS International: Provide work permit services for students who secure their own jobs ahead of time, related to their course of study.

### Exchange and placement programs

Exchange programs tend to be competitive because of the finite number of positions available (an even exchange of students coming into and going out of a country), usually must be related to a course of study and require a processing fee. Examples include:

- **IAESTE** (International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience) (<http://www.iaesteunitedstates.org>): American science and technology students can apply for paid internships abroad through the program or use the work-permit service once they've located their own international internship. Eighty countries have local chapters who are responsible for raising jobs. These jobs go to a national chapter which goes to an international conference and "swaps" jobs. Applicants pay program fees.
- **AISEC** ([www.aiesec.org](http://www.aiesec.org)): Program works with a broader group of students, including those of business, sociology, sciences, teaching and IT. Participants often work in service and hospitality jobs. Being flexible as to one's geographic placement helps increase chances of getting placed. An "Americans Abroad" program is also available to young professionals.
- **Cultural Vistas** (<http://www.culturalvistas.org/>) Internship and work abroad programs in various countries for students and young professionals

Placement programs guarantee placement of participants in a job for a fee. Fees range from hundreds to thousands of dollars, with a corresponding range/scope of services. Not all placements will be paid. These programs work best for students who need a specific target industry. Examples include:

- Adelante ([www.adelanteabroad.com](http://www.adelanteabroad.com)): Intern in Spain, Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, England, Scotland and Mexico
- Cultural Embrace ([www.culturalembrace.com](http://www.culturalembrace.com)): Teach, work, intern, and volunteer opportunities around the world.

### Study abroad and international organizations

Study abroad internships usually must be for academic credit. Study abroad offices may have more information. International organizations, such as the US Department of State, CIA, European Union, United Nations and various NGOs, do their own recruitment. However, most of these internships will be in Washington, DC, not abroad. Government and politics internships are almost impossible to get through a study-abroad experience.

### Teaching abroad

These positions are the easiest work abroad experiences for Americans to get. Examples include:

- **JET (Japanese Exchange and Teaching) Program** (<http://www.jetprogramme.org/>) and <http://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/JET/>: This competitive program places participants in a Japanese public school for one to three years. There is a large demand for these teachers, however, and the position is a "real," fairly well-paid job. Earnings are tax free and qualify for a grad school deferral.
- **United TEFL Training (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Program** (<http://www.europetefl.com/>): TEFL training and teaching English in Europe, Asia, Latin America and New York City.
- **World Teach** ([www.worldteach.org](http://www.worldteach.org)): Through Harvard
- **Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE)** ([www.ciee.org/teach.aspx](http://www.ciee.org/teach.aspx)): Teach in China, Chile, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Morocco, Peru, Senegal, South Korea, Spain, Vietnam or Thailand
- **Peace Corps** ([www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov))
- **Fulbright English Teaching Assistantships** (<http://us.fulbrightonline.org/about/types-of-grants/english-teaching-assistant-awards/>): Teach English in the school system in countries around the world; program is run in conjunction with U.S. Department of State.

### Volunteering abroad

Volunteer experiences can be close to internship experiences. For example, a pre-med student interested in public health could gain a wealth of experience volunteering. These experiences often provide room and board. Examples include:

- Amigos de las Americas (<https://amigosinternational.org/>)
- Peace Corps ([www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov))
- Volunteers for Peace ([www.vfp.org/](http://www.vfp.org/))
- Mission groups/religiously affiliated organizations (e.g. YMCA in Brazil, which provides health education in indigenous communities.)

### International job vs. international career

Unlike short-term casual or internship opportunities, long-term, professional careers abroad usually take time to develop. Working in incremental stages makes this goal more achievable, as does a graduate degree (e.g. MBA, MA in International Affairs). English instruction and IT skills are highly sought after. In fact, in Germany IT workers are in such demand that the country issues work authorization similar to a US "greencard" for these jobs. Employers who offer international careers include:

- Government: US Department of State/Foreign Service ([www.state.gov/](http://www.state.gov/), <http://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/officer/>); CIA (<https://www.cia.gov/careers/index.html>); National Security Agency (NSA) ([www.nsa.gov/careers](http://www.nsa.gov/careers)); Careers in Intelligence (<https://amigosinternational.org/>) etc.
- Business: MBAs usually required
- Teaching: TEFL certification usually required, takes about one month and \$4,000 to get
- International non-profits: ([www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org)), International Committee of the Red Cross (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/who-we-are/jobs/index.jsp>), etc.

### Additional Resources

Numerous print resources are available in Career Services' Resource Center, Prothro Center for Lifelong Learning, Ste. 140: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., no appointment needed. Also look online at <http://southwestern.edu/offices/careers/international.php>.