

Working Abroad: Employment Outside the United States

Objectives

1. Examine issues involved in working abroad.
2. Review cultural implications of working abroad.
3. Find resources to learn more about international career opportunities.

Why Work Abroad?

Working in a foreign country can be an exciting and enriching experience. The opportunities to share your career-related expertise with international peers, travel to interesting places, and gain cross-cultural insight are tremendous. Many people who have worked abroad feel the experience helped them to grow, and their memories of the experience last a lifetime.

How Long to Work Abroad?

As with any other employment opportunity, it is important to consider how much time you want to commit to working abroad. Some overseas assignments may be for specified lengths of time, while others may be open-ended, depending on the organization. Two strategies for seeking full-time employment overseas are:

1. Pursue a long-term position with a company whose affiliates are in foreign countries, search for foreign-based companies that have U.S. offices, or seek American-based companies that have branches in foreign countries (e.g., Coca-Cola). Many American companies with offices abroad require employees to build seniority before assigning them to other countries. If you are seeking placement in a foreign country, be sure to ask for information regarding company policies for assigning employees abroad.
2. Seek shorter-term work with foreign employers, such as teaching English or providing a service. For example, there are many non-professional positions such as servers, bartenders, and maids available in other countries. Another option is to work as an au pair caring for a family's children and home in exchange for room and board. Such work can be obtained fairly easily through agencies specializing in these positions. Summer jobs may involve agricultural work, working on an archaeological dig, or working in a kibbutz. In most cases, more satisfaction comes from being



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part of a new culture than from job-related duties. Many students report that the opportunity to meet and work with new people made up for the nature of their service-oriented work. Groups such as the British Universities North America Club (BUNAC) and the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) provide information to students on options for working abroad. Additional information is also available in The Career Center Library.

What Experience Do You Want?

Once you decide how long you want to work abroad, consider what kind of work experience will benefit your career goals. Some of your options include finding experience through:

An American Employer

American-based firms with branches in foreign countries have two choices for filling job vacancies – American employees or qualified nationals. Americans sent abroad by their firm are usually employees who have been with the company and proven their desire to establish themselves within that company.

If you choose this route for obtaining international employment, remember that you may have to work in the United States before you work abroad. It is always important to gather information regarding international employment possibilities from a company prior to accepting employment. Be sure you inform your employer early of your desire to work abroad at some point in your career. If you wish to work abroad for an American firm, it is advisable to negotiate with the company while still in the United States. This way, you can discuss transportation and relocation costs in your negotiations.

A Foreign Employer

With some exceptions, your chances of being hired by a foreign-based firm are slim. Often the employer must prove to the government that none of his/her fellow nationals are being denied employment because a foreign employee is being hired. As always, changing global economic and political trends, as well as technological needs, can shape the availability of employment for Americans in foreign countries. Permit and visa requirements also vary among countries.

The U.S. Government

Some United States government departments hire personnel to work abroad. The Foreign Service branch of the Department of State has placements in embassies and consulates worldwide. Applicants must pass one or more exams (the Foreign Service Exam, etc.) to be considered for these positions. Learn more at www.careers.state.gov or at The Career Center.

The Department of Defense (DOD) at www.dodea.edu offers many opportunities abroad as well, including employment as a teacher, counselor, or educational specialist. The DOD hires Americans with proper credentials to be employed on military and government bases in foreign countries. Language fluency is sometimes less of a concern in these work settings, since Americans are the majority of the population.

The Peace Corps also provides volunteer opportunities for individuals with a wide variety of interests and geographical preferences. Information is available online at www.peacecorps.gov and in The Career Center Library. Representatives frequently visit the FSU campus to provide information and recruit participants during the academic year.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

International organizations like the United Nations and the Red Cross can be another source of employment abroad. These organizations conduct a multitude of programs, such as UNICEF, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Health Organization. The needs of these organizations vary greatly depending on their activities, and employment opportunities may be limited. You will probably work in the same professional capacity abroad as you do in the United States. You should directly contact any organization in which you are interested to determine its current hiring needs.

Teaching Abroad

If you are looking for a new experience abroad but are not fluent in a language other than English and have not been hired by an international organization, you might consider teaching. Many countries seek out recent college graduates to teach English to both children and adults. While some countries require a TESOL certificate (www.tesol.org), many do not.

A general search online will result in thousands of different agencies to assist in locating teaching positions abroad. It can be difficult to discern a reputable site from a poor quality site, but one way to do this is to contact someone who has previously or is currently teaching English abroad. Speak to a career advisor at The Career Center to help you begin this process if you are unsure of where to start.

Searching On Your Own

Be sure you are particularly fluent in the native language of a country before striking out on an independent job search. A successful job hunt is more likely to occur in countries with labor shortages, in certain fields, and in developing countries with inadequate employee pools from which to draw. Keeping abreast of current events and global, economic, and political trends will help you in your search.

Volunteer Opportunities

If salary is not a concern, a work camp or service project may be a solution. A wide range of options are available, from building homes and schools to teaching basic community hygiene. Opportunities are also available through churches, service organizations, and famine and relief agencies. Consider a traineeship or internship overseas. Economics, architecture, mathematics, management, and the sciences are just a few of the disciplines in which training is available.

What Documents Will I Need?

Many countries require working papers. In some countries, you must have a firm job offer before working papers will be issued. If possible, get your working papers before you leave the United States. The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) can help you get a work permit for a summer job in France or New Zealand, or for temporary jobs year-round in England and Ireland. Work in Israel on a kibbutz may also be arranged through CIEE. Visit www.ciee.org to learn about these and other options for working abroad.

You may also need a residence and/or immigration visa. Check with resources, agencies, and foreign government officials before you leave to make sure you do not become a victim of red tape once you are abroad. Keep in mind that governments often put restrictions and lengthy procedures on the employment of foreign nationals to protect jobs for their own citizens. Plan well in advance of your departure date. Prepare for delays and difficulties as they will occur. Your best remedy is to ensure you have a buffer zone of extra time.

How Will I Adapt to a Foreign Culture?

As an American working abroad, you will be seen as a representative of the United States and of the organization with which you work. Your actions may be more closely scrutinized than if you were in a comparable situation in the U.S. It is imperative that you familiarize yourself with cultural norms and native customs so as not to unknowingly offend the people with whom you work and live. Your employer might help you find a mentor to facilitate your adjustment to the new culture. Resources in The Career Center can help get you started.

If your family moves abroad with you, familiarize yourself with the educational philosophy of your host country so that you and your children may adjust more easily to the inevitable differences. Language fluency will ultimately add to the ease of your transition, as well as increase the enjoyment and freedom you experience while abroad.

Where Can I Learn More?

Public and university libraries can provide additional resources and information on working abroad. Faculty and staff may also be useful sources of information on this topic. Meet with faculty in fields in which you want to work; they may have useful facts or relevant contacts.

The Internet also contains many resources related to working abroad. For more information, review a copy of the “Using the Internet in Your Job Search” guide (available at The Career Center or online at career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides).

Online directories often include international employer information. Two such databases are Business and Company Resource Center and Hoover’s Company Information. Each database provides contact information for many types of organizations. To access each database, go to the FSU Libraries website at www.lib.fsu.edu. On the homepage, select the “Find a Database” link. Click on the A-Z link (option 3), and select a database from the alphabetical listing. Use the steps outlined below to search through these databases:

Business and Company ASAP

- Click the Search Now link under the Company Search icon.
- Type in the name of a product in Product/Brand Name or Product/Brand Type box.
- Type in the country you are researching in the State/Country box.
- Click Search.

Hoover’s Company Profiles via ProQuest

- Select Advanced Search if it doesn’t come up by default.
- Choose one or more of types of companies you are interested in by selecting them in the Company/org type box. Skip this step if you do not want to limit your search by company type.
- Type the name of the country in the Location box.
- Click Search.

GoInGlobal is a web-based resource that provides information related to international employment for more than 80 countries, including Mexico, Russia, United Arab Emirates, and Dubai. In addition to current opportunities for work abroad, you can find culture-specific advice on résumé writing and interviewing, country-specific employment trends, and company/industry profiles. For company profiles, choose the Key Employer Directory. To access GOINGLOBAL, log in to Secure Apps through Blackboard at campus.fsu.edu using your FSUID and password.

Uniworld is accessed by logging into Secure Apps through Blackboard at campus.fsu.edu using your FSUID and password.

FSU's Office of International Programs offers full-time internship placement in the fall, spring, and summer semesters. Integral to FSU's global perspective, internships offer students valuable career experience, but more intense cultural interaction. Internship placements are available in London, England; Florence, Italy; Panama City, Republic of Panama; and Valencia, Spain. Students can gain experience in several fields of study including the arts, business, education, and social welfare, depending upon the country where the internship is located.

Both undergraduate and graduate students are encouraged to apply for these competitive internships.

Programs in Spain and Panama also require strong comprehension and conversation skills in Spanish. Students must arrange for course credit through their academic departments, which must approve the student's internship abroad. To learn more about your international internship options and the application process, visit international.fsu.edu, drop by UCA5500, or call 850.644.3272.

Summary

Working abroad can be an exciting and enriching experience, but there are many factors that contribute to living and careering in a foreign country. It is important to consider logistical, cultural, personal, and career development issues that are involved in an international work experience to inform your career decision-making.

Additional Resources

Select Career Center Library Resources

Looking for more information on working abroad? Visit The Career Center Library for books and other resources on this topic.

Select Online Resources

- www.ciee.org
- www.searchassociates.com
- www.iss.edu.sg
- jobs.goabroad.com
- www.transitionsabroad.com
- www.overseasdigest.com
- www.visapro.com
- www.overseasjobs.com

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Alternative Format Available
Revised 3/16