

## The Benefits of a Year Abroad

Studying abroad, for any period of time, is a highly rewarding experience. Students returning from a study abroad programme frequently describe their experience as 'life-changing'. Studying abroad can have a profound effect on how you view the world and your place within it. It takes you out of your comfort zone and continuously challenges you. As an individual, you will develop independence and self-reliance. Indeed, the experiences and skills you develop abroad will help you mature both personally and academically, and will improve your career prospects.

### **A semester is not enough**

However, independent research reveals that the longer students study abroad the greater the academic, career, cultural and personal benefits. According to Lance Kenney, Director of International Programs at Villanova University, "I can't emphasize enough the benefits of studying overseas for a year versus a semester. I have seen this longer duration lead to greater levels of independence, confidence and maturity on the part of students." This is a view fully endorsed by Ethan Merritt, Senior Study Abroad Advisor at American University, "The full year experience in our view gives students a much more immersive experience and allows for more development (academically and personally) than just a semester. Besides the fact that a semester just goes so fast! We often tell students that in going abroad for a semester, just when they are starting to really feel comfortable with things, the semester is ending and they have to leave."

### **Enhance your personal development**

Students who study abroad for a year frequently refer to the levels of personal growth they experience. "A great experience! It represents an enrichment on every level," said Arnaud Alves de Souza (HEC Lausanne) when asked how the General Course programme at LSE had benefited him. This view is reinforced by the vast majority of student surveyed by the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES). When questioned about personal growth, 98% said studying abroad for a full year increased their self-confidence and served as a catalyst for increased maturity and 97% revealed that it had a lasting impact on their world view.

IES research also revealed that study abroad enables participants to forge enduring friendships with people from around the globe. More than half the respondents were still in contact with friends met while studying abroad, and 94% said that their experiences on a full year programme influenced them to seek out a greater diversity of friends. In addition to personal growth a year abroad also has academic benefits. Indeed, a year abroad can enhance the value of your degree by giving you access to courses and lecturers that you wouldn't have had access to at your home institution. As Lance Kenney noted, studying for a year abroad allows students to "study a subject with more breadth and depth."

### **Become more culturally aware**

A frequently cited benefit of study abroad is the cultural awareness participants gain. Douglass Daft, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Coca-Cola, is a firm believer in this notion, "International education ignites a passion for understanding other people and their perspectives. That's one important benefit to working or studying abroad - and it's essential to success in our increasingly diverse world. Students with international exposure come to understand the value of dialogue between people from different cultures and between people with different points of view." This is also the view of J. Scott Van Der Meid, Director of Study Abroad at Brandeis University, "We strongly encourage students to consider the option of studying abroad for a full academic year. By spending nine or ten months in another country you will become more integrated in the local scene and improve your knowledge of the culture tremendously."

IES survey data supports these conclusions. When questioned about intercultural development, an impressive 99% of students reported that studying abroad had helped them to better understand their own cultural values and biases, and 82% said that their year abroad contributed to their developing a more sophisticated way of looking at the world. In addition to experiencing the culture of another country a year long program provides ample opportunity to travel. Weekends and vacation periods allow students to explore their immediate and distant surroundings. These cultural experiences have been succinctly summed up by Lance Kenney, “The longer one lives in another culture, the greater the development of one’s ‘cultural intelligence’”.

## **Get ahead in the job market**

A year of studying abroad will almost certainly be advantageous to your future career. “In potential recruits, employers place a great value on adaptability, flexibility and the ability to communicate well with people from different cultures. Students who have spent time working or studying overseas usually develop these skills and can demonstrate them to employers,” observed Ian McLoughlin of the LSE Careers Service.

Research carried out by the Institute of International Education (IIE) reaffirms this notion. Their study revealed that employers most important selection criteria in recruiting new staff are interpersonal skills and that these skills are likely to be strongest in individuals who have spent time abroad. Indeed, American students who had studied overseas reported a number of advantages to having spent a year abroad. These included factors such as “it brings up conversation during the interview”; “employers are impressed that I had the courage to study overseas” and “international education/experience is sought after”.

## **Be better prepared for further study**

A year abroad will also give you an edge when applying for graduate studies. “The year long LSE General Course gives you a chance to really get involved in the intellectual life and opportunities offered by a top rated research institution – it is the difference between being a tourist and a traveller,” explained Simon Beattie, Head of Graduate Admissions at LSE.

The demand for international experience amongst employers and graduate schools is likely to continue. As Allan Goodman, President and Chief Executive Officer for the Institute of International Education has pointed out, “In the coming century, more students will want international educational opportunities as part of their preparation for careers in business as well as the public sector. Top corporate and government leaders are telling us that their “high performers” are going to need to come to them already equipped to think and work on a global basis.”

## **Choose to stand out**

A year of study abroad can be enormously beneficial. Indeed, with so many life-changing and enduring academic, career, cultural, personal and social benefits all students should give serious consideration to studying abroad for a year. But where should you go? As Matthew Frisch (University of Pennsylvania), an alumnus of LSE’s General Course, put it, “Academically, culturally, and socially, LSE offers the best study abroad experience out there.” What more do you need to know!