

Standing Out in a Competitive Market

The Impact of a Global Internship on Career Readiness



LEAH MASON, ED. D. AND SAMANTHA MONROE

The logo for CIEE, featuring the lowercase letters 'ciece' in a white, sans-serif font. A small orange arc is positioned above the letter 'i'.

The logo for IIE, featuring the lowercase letters 'iie' in a white, sans-serif font. The letter 'i' has three small white circles stacked vertically above it.
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Standing out in a competitive market: The impact of a global internship on career readiness

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Key Findings

The opportunity to participate in a global internship is now featured prominently in study abroad program offerings. This joint CIEE and IIE research study features data from eight stakeholder organizations that facilitate global internship experiences for study abroad students through their organization. It explores the professional outcomes of study abroad alumni who engaged in an internship while overseas and highlights the impact of the global internship experience on the alumni's reported development of 21st-century skills and their relevance in their careers today.

- Global internships attract a more diverse participant profile than the traditional study abroad. Sixty-four percent of global interns identified with one or more underrepresented backgrounds (e.g., first-generation college students).
- Global internships positively impact the development of 21st-century job skills. Participants self-reported significant increases in 21st-century skills, with the greatest increases in the category of intrapersonal competencies, followed by cognitive and interpersonal competencies. Two intrapersonal competencies, intercultural skills, and flexibility/adaptability, marked the highest growth at 86 and 85 percent, respectively.
- Developing 21st-century skills through global internship activities demonstrates the value of an internship on career pathways across industries. Among the activities offered by the study abroad organization, the activities most closely associated with positive career goals included networking events with employers (44 percent), social and cultural events (43 percent), and interview prep support for internship placement (40 percent). Among the support facilitated by the host employer organization, the supports most closely associated with positive career goals included project-based work assignments (58 percent), mentorship from a co-worker (58 percent), and regular feedback on assignments and/or communication (57 percent).
- Participation in a global internship expands career pathways. For more than half (56 percent) of respondents, the internship confirmed their industry. One in four employed respondents works at the same organization where they completed their internship. For other respondents, the internship made them aware of other opportunities in their industry or led them to change industries.
- Three in four alumni confirmed that participating in an internship abroad was helpful in acquiring their first full-time job. Eighty-five percent of respondents highlighted their experiences and skills in their CVs and professional profiles.
- Overall, respondents indicated that the 21st-century skills developed through global internships were also those most relevant in the workplace, indicating internships positively support alumni's employability and professional outcomes.

Introduction

The opportunity to participate in a global internship is now featured prominently in study abroad program offerings, alongside the traditional features – language and cultural immersion, travel, and academic coursework – that have long been at the top of the list. This trend in recent years has addressed student interest in preparing to enter the globally competitive workforce (Grey, 2024). The NACE 2024 Student Survey reported that more students than ever are participating in an internship before graduation, with two-thirds of the 2024 graduating class having engaged in an internship during their academic career. The integration of these two areas of academic programming, study abroad and internships, is no coincidence.

Emphasis on high-impact practices such as internships and study abroad has received more attention as students and their higher education institutions focus on career readiness. While high impact defines their positive association with student success, and Kuh (2008) describes high-impact practices as life-changing, their relationship to employability is noteworthy. Research shows that internships are a key differentiator among employers when hiring (NACE, 2023). Students who participate in study abroad, develop language skills, or study world regions develop a wide range of 21st-century job skills that positively affect their professional outcomes (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Mason et al., 2023). NAFSA & Emsi (2020) reported that, in 2019, the global skills students hone while on a study abroad experience were mentioned in more than 31 million unique job postings, and employers spend more time trying to identify candidates for the positions that require this skill set.

This research study builds on previous IIE research on the intersections between study abroad, language and areas studies, and employability (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Mason et al., 2023). It explores the professional outcomes of study abroad alumni who engaged in an internship while overseas, either in-person, hybrid, or remotely. It identifies their current employment status and the relationship between their global internship experience and their current role. Finally, it examines the impact of the global internship experience on the alumni's reported development of 21st-century skills and their relevance in their careers today.

21st-Century Workforce Skills

The labor skills valued by employers have evolved to encompass a global focus, reflecting the needs of a 21st-century workforce (Rihan-Bonner, 2014). Skills are divided into two groups: hard skills and soft skills (Lyu & Liu, 2021). Hard skills are the technical skills and specialized knowledge learned through job-specific training, often measured through certifications or examinations. Soft skills are referred to as attributes or workplace skills that describe how an individual approaches their work and interacts with others in the workplace. Al Asefer and Abidin (2021) argue that soft skills are so essential to employers in a global workforce that they also predict graduates' employability.

The 21st-century workforce skills list used in this research study is a compilation of soft and hard skills that fall under three domains: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal competencies, and that builds on competencies identified in prior U.S. and European research as most desired by 21st-century employers including NACE's Career Readiness and Competencies; The Professional Value of ERASMUS (VALERA) Study; Memo© Factors of Employability / The Erasmus Impact Study; Faktaa – Facts and

Figures: Hidden Competencies; American Management Development Competency Model; and the Robles study: Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace (See Appendix A). IIE has used this combination of 21st-century workforce skills in several studies and research regarding the benefits of these skills in the global workplace and has seen its adoption by other international education organizations as well (AFS Intercultural Programs, 2019; Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Martel, 2020).

Research Methodology

The IIE research team employed a multi-phased, exploratory sequential design. The design enabled the research team to identify the study population in the first phase and integrate feedback loops of analysis to inform the findings. The following questions guided the research study:

- Where are alumni employed, and in what is the relationship to their current role?
- What is the impact of a global internship on alumni employment outcomes?

By collecting employability data on global internship alumni, this study achieves research outcomes that support investments in individuals for the global workforce. It provides comprehensive data for universities and their internship partners seeking to better support students' development of global competencies and workforce skills following an internship experience. It identifies trends to inform the broader conversation between higher education institutions, their study abroad and internship partners, and employers around the skills graduates should gain and possess to be successful in the global workforce.

Data Collection

In the first phase of the research, the IIE research team convened ten key stakeholders in the global internship industry in February 2024. The team invited stakeholders to share information about study abroad internship program models implemented by their organizations, measures of success in place, and access to their alumni population. Eight organizations participated in the study by distributing the survey to their alumni population, including AIFS Abroad, Cenet, CET Academic Programs, CIEE, InterExchange, ISEP, The Intern Group, and Virtual Internships.

In the second phase of the research, the IIE research team administered a survey to internship study abroad alumni in coordination with eight key stakeholders from April 2024 to May 2024. IIE provided each organization with a custom survey link and email text to send to their alumni population who met the following definition: individuals, U.S. and international, who participated in and completed an internship outside of their home country between 2013 and 2023.

The research team collected 607 valid responses across the eight organizations. The internships of the respondents took place between 2013 and 2023, where 48 percent of internships were located in the United States, 45 percent were in destinations outside of the United States, and another 7 percent took place fully online.

The research team used SPSS software to analyze the quantitative survey data and produce descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations to understand the relationship between different variables. Qualitative responses from the survey were analyzed and grouped into themes.

IIE conducted an action-reflection workshop in June 2024 with key stakeholders to share the preliminary findings and gather additional context relevant to the data. The discussion prompted the research team to conduct additional analyses aimed at understanding the effects of credit and compensation on the internship experience and employability outcomes. Finally, IIE held one-on-one interviews in July 2024 with eight survey respondents who indicated their interest and willingness to further discuss their global internship experience. The interviews sought to gain insights into the survey findings and discussions with key stakeholders.

Study Limitations

One limitation of this study was that survey administration was shared by IIE and stakeholder organizations. The stakeholder organizations identified the alumni pool that met the definition outlined in IIE's methodology and stakeholders voluntarily distributed the survey to their alumni. As such, the number of respondents from each organization varied widely, with an overrepresentation from one stakeholder organization. The number of respondents from each organization may also reflect the time and resources they had available to voluntarily contribute to the survey administration, the quality of each organization's contact data over the ten-year period, as well as the relationship between the organizations and alumni.

A second limitation is related to the respondents themselves. More recent alumni may remember the organization more readily and be more eager to participate. Alumni opting to participate may also be those who have a successful outcome to share, reflecting self-selection bias in the data.

Furthermore, the conclusions in this study are drawn from self-reported data by survey respondents and, therefore, cannot necessarily be generalized to the broader alumni populations at every stakeholder organization.

Global Internship Alumni Respondent Profile

The research team collected 607 valid global internship alumni responses across eight stakeholder organizations. This section outlines the respondents' profiles by first providing details about the alumni's characteristics, then outlining their relationship with the study abroad and internship organization, and finally describing their internship experience.

Global Intern Characteristics

The majority of the 607 respondents completed their global internships between 2021-2023 (51 percent), followed by respondents between 2017-2020 (34 percent) and 2013-2016 (15 percent). As such, it is not surprising that the vast majority, 89 percent, of respondents were between the ages of 20-34. While most (83 percent) respondents completed only one internship experience, 17 percent had completed more than one internship. Among the survey population, respondents were well educated,

with 34 percent having completed an advanced degree and another 46 percent holding a bachelor’s as their highest degree earned.

Notably, the profile of the internship respondents from our research study differs from the traditional U.S. study abroad student profile reported by the *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* (Figure 1). While female students were the majority in both groups, the proportions differ by more than ten percentage points as more male and nonbinary students participated in study abroad programming that included an internship component. In addition, a greater representation of students of color is evident among the internship respondents, with nearly half of all internship respondents identifying as students of color, in comparison to 31 percent of study abroad students, as reported by *Open Doors*.

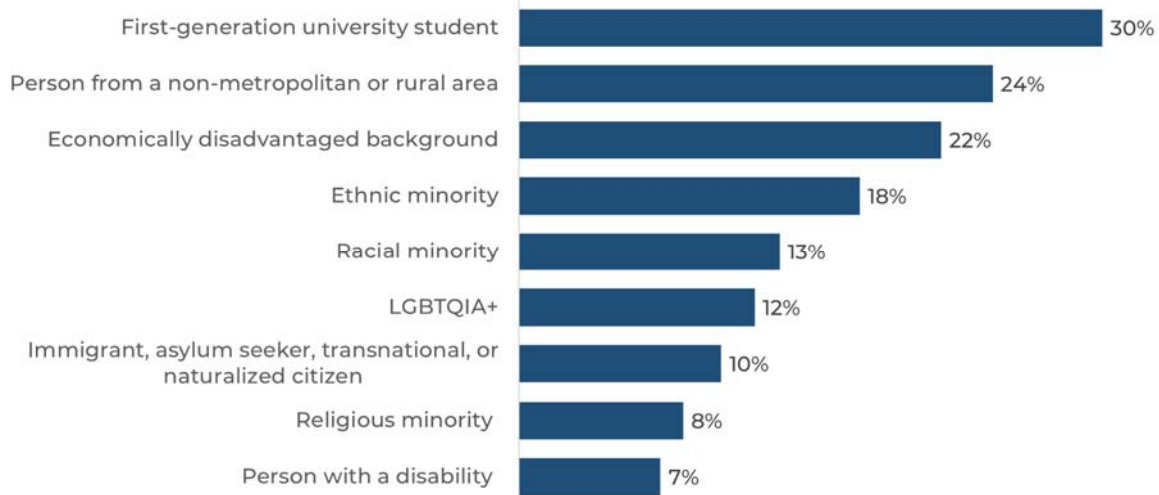
Figure 1: Comparison of Internship Respondent Profile and Open Doors U.S. Study Abroad Profile

	Internship Respondent Profile	Open Doors Study Abroad Profile, 2023
Gender		
Female	58%	69%
Male	39%	31%
Nonbinary	1%	<1%
Racial/Ethnic Background		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander	16%	9%
Black or African American	14%	5%
Hispanic or Latino(a)	9%	12%
Middle Eastern or North African	5%	-
Multiracial	-	5%
White	52%	69%

Source: *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, 2023*

Respondents were asked to provide additional details about their identity (Figure 2). Over sixty percent of respondents identified with one or more underrepresented groups. One-third of all respondents identified as a first-generation college student, followed by a quarter of all respondents living in a non-metropolitan or rural area. While much work remains to be done to include more underrepresented students in study abroad and global internship experiences, these findings indicate that global internships attract a diverse pool of students.

Figure 2: Internship Respondents: Profile Characteristics

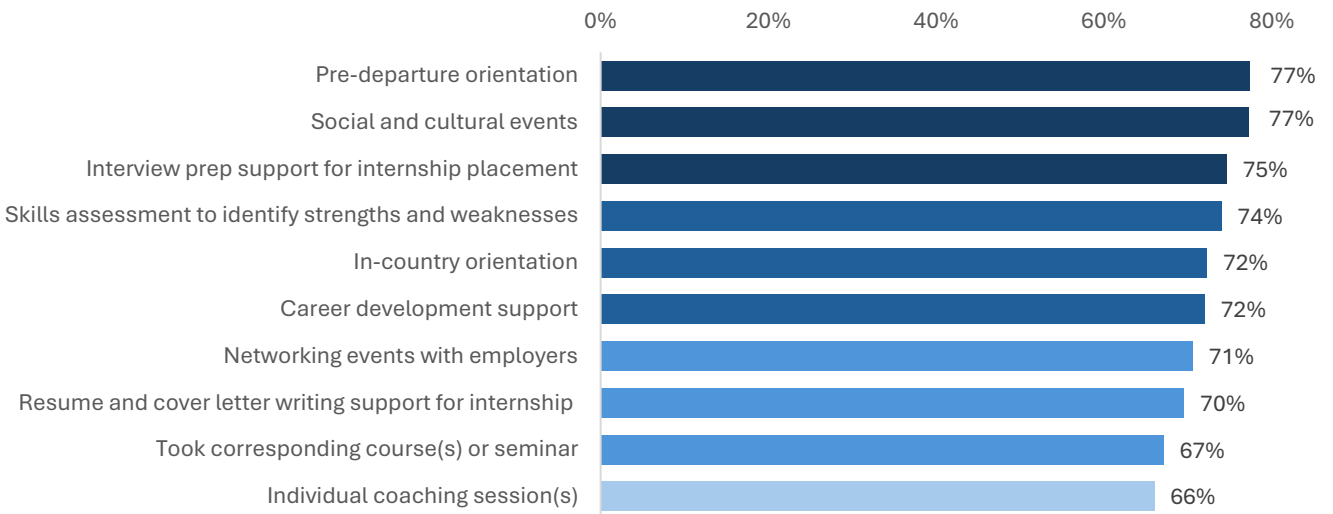


The internship respondents were enrolled at various academic levels and in a range of majors and specializations during their internship experience. At the time of their internship, approximately half (49 percent) were undergraduate students, with slightly fewer (41 percent) being graduate students and some enrolled in non-degree activities, such as training or workshops (2 percent). The most common fields of study of the internship respondents were business and management (22 percent), hospitality (15 percent), and engineering (15 percent).

Stakeholder Relationships

The eight study abroad organizations included in this research study offered an internship component as part of the student study abroad experience. These organizations then also engaged students in an array of activities to support their success before, during, and after the global internship experience. The activities were intended to support students' preparation for acquiring the internship, students' skill development and professional engagement during the internship, and students' career services needs following completion of the internship. While more than half of all respondents indicated all of the activities had a significant or very significant effect on their experience, the activities respondents indicated as having the most significant impact on their engagement with their host employer organization were the pre-departure orientation (77 percent), social and cultural events (77 percent), and interview prep support for internship placement (75 percent) (Figure 3). This indicates that study abroad organizations are providing the necessary and expected support to students to acquire their internship placement and acclimate to the work environment. However, there is space for host employer organizations, study abroad organizations, and universities to partner and help students articulate their global internship experience in interviews and across their professional networks when looking for future employment opportunities after the internship has concluded.

Figure 3: Top activities positively affecting the internship experience



Internship Experience

Respondents completed global internships across 44 countries in all world regions and in 20 languages. The top five internship locations were the United States (48 percent), the United Kingdom (5 percent), Spain (4 percent), Ireland (3 percent), and South Africa (2 percent). Notably, 12 percent of students participated in multi-destination internships, and 8 percent participated virtually. The majority (81 percent) conducted their internship in English, with another 8 percent using Spanish and 3 percent using French. This indicates that internships are available worldwide, and students can identify opportunities to contribute to work in a global context that fits their interests.

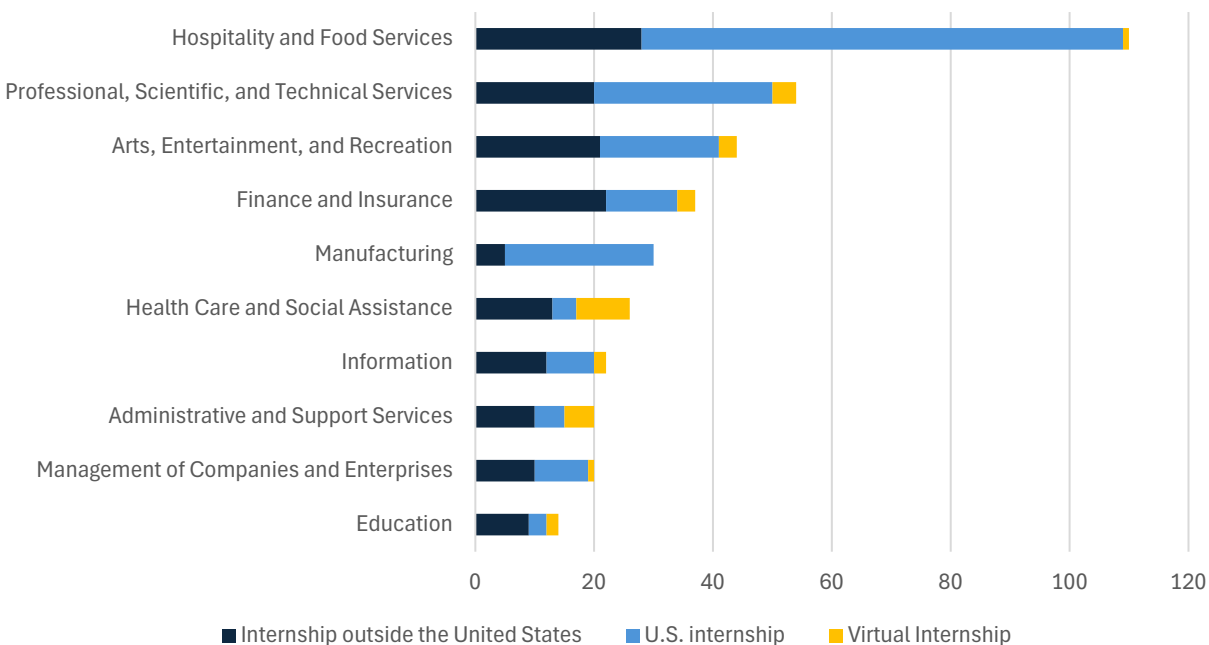
As the future of work continues to evolve, how students participate in internships is also changing. Respondents predominantly (71 percent) completed their global internships in person, with 17 percent taking place fully virtually and 13 percent in a hybrid work environment. When broken down by internship year, a clear trend toward greater participation in virtual and hybrid internships is evident after the COVID-19 pandemic. Fewer than 10 percent of global internships completed between 2013 and 2019 were virtual or hybrid, whereas nearly half of those completed from 2020 to 2023 were virtual or hybrid.

Students invested a significant amount of time in their internship. Nearly half (47 percent) of all global internships were longer than 16 weeks, with another 40 percent taking place from 8 to 16 weeks and 13 percent having a duration of less than 8 weeks. More than three-quarters of respondents (77 percent) stated they worked greater than 20 hours per week at their internship, with 17 percent working between 10 to 20 hours per week and 6 percent working less than or equal to 10 hours per week.

Respondents completed internships in all industries, with certain industries more dominant in specific locations (Figure 4). The largest number of respondents interned in hospitality and food services (22 percent), followed by professional, scientific, and technical services (13 percent) and the arts,

entertainment, and recreation (7 percent). Although hospitality and food services were the most popular internship industry for U.S. and internationally-based internships, the number of international students participating in a global internship in the hospitality and food services industry in the United States is nearly three times higher than that of students interning at a location outside of the United States. International students also favored U.S.-based internships in professional, scientific, and technical services as well as manufacturing industries. In contrast, top choices for students interning outside of the United States included finance and insurance as well as arts, entertainment, and recreation industries. The most common virtual internship industry was health care and social assistance, followed by administrative support services.

Figure 4: Top 10 global internship industries by location of internship

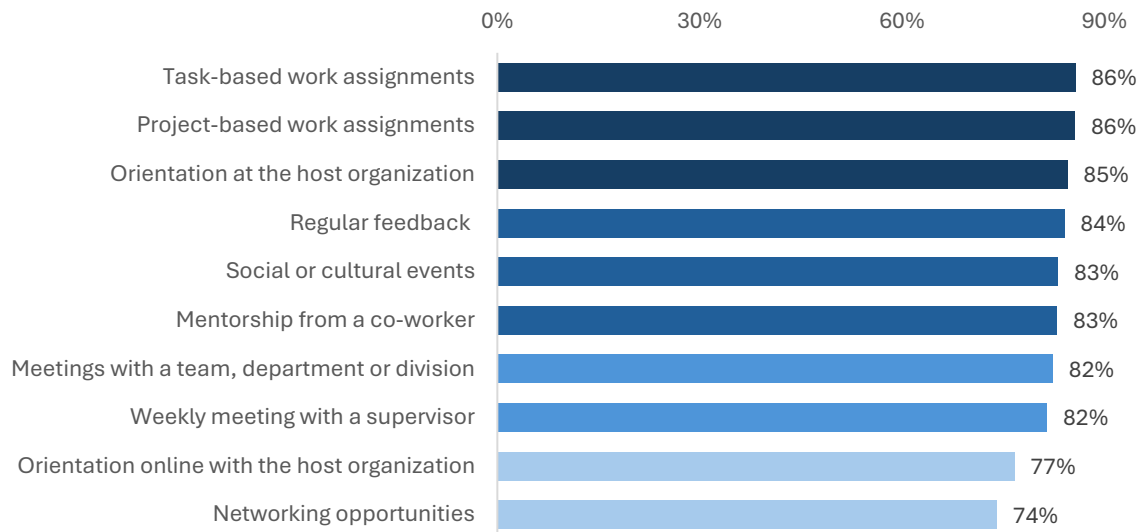


During their internship, 46 percent of respondents received academic credit from their institution. This varied slightly by internship location, with 51 percent of those based at an international internship site receiving academic credit, 44 percent of those based at a U.S. site receiving academic credit, and only 38 percent of those interning virtually receiving academic credit. In addition, 46 percent received some form of compensation or remuneration from either their university or the host employer organization for the internship work. This varied more significantly, with 71 percent of respondents based at an international internship site receiving compensation, 26 percent at a U.S. site, and only 10 percent interning virtually receiving compensation for their work.

Host employer organizations where students interned also offered students a variety of supports to ensure they had a successful experience (Figure 5). Overall, survey respondents noted that the host employer organization's support had a very significant impact on their global internship experience. In fact, at least 74 percent of respondents selected each of the support options provided by the host employer organization to the intern as significant or very significant. The three activities ranked most

highly were task-based work assignments (86 percent), project-based work assignments (86 percent), and orientation at the host employer organization (85 percent).

Figure 5: Top activities by the host employer organization positively affecting the internship experience



Global Internship Alumni Skill Development

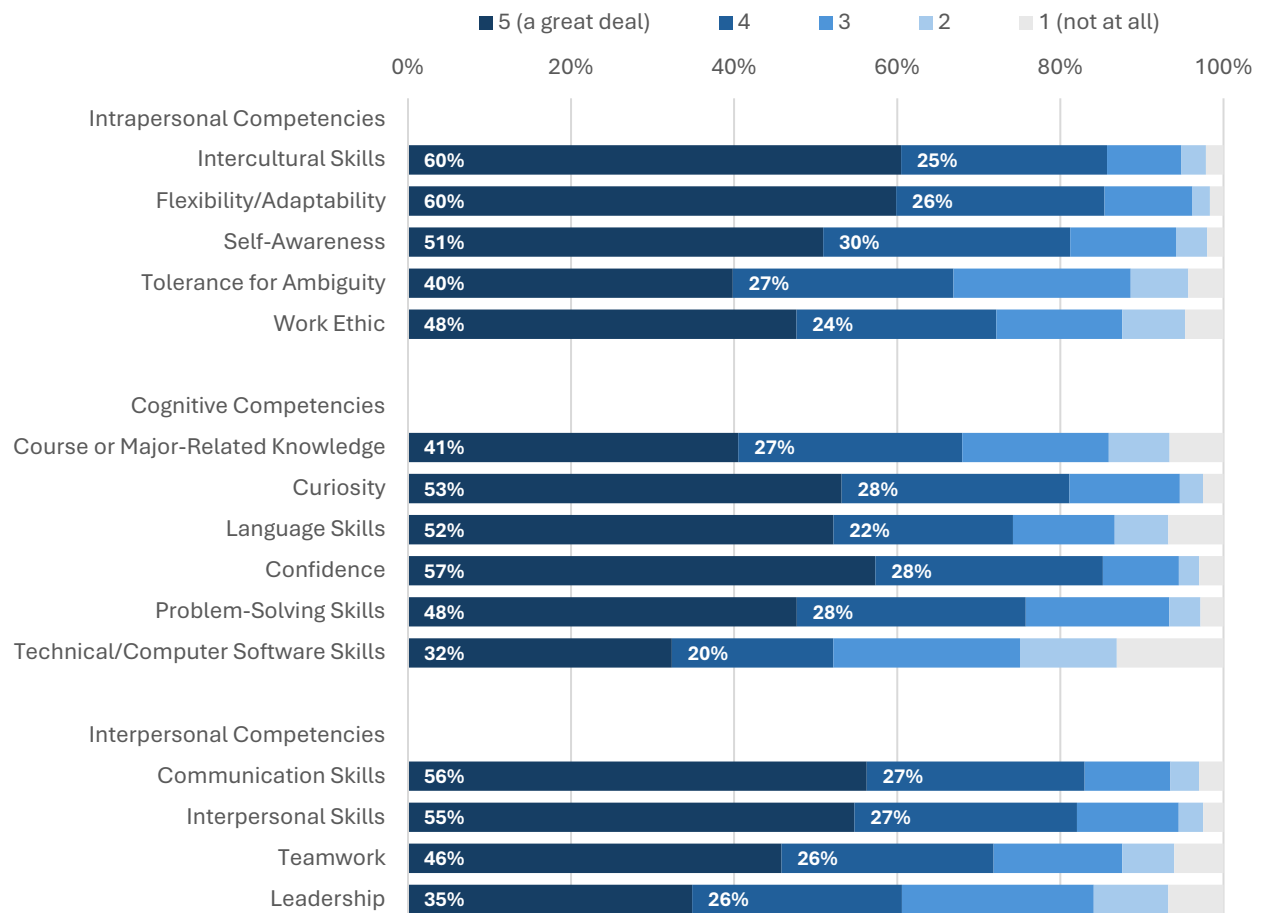
Participation in a global internship has an overall positive impact on the development of 21st-century job skills. A majority (81 percent) of internship respondents indicated that participation in a global internship supported their development of a wide range of 21st-century job skills relevant to their professional and academic journeys. Furthermore, respondents who completed global internships of 8 weeks or longer indicated feeling more prepared for the skills needed in their professional careers compared to those who participated in internships that were shorter than 8 weeks.

Overall, participants self-reported significant increases in 21st-century skills, with the greatest increases in intrapersonal competencies, followed by cognitive and interpersonal competencies (Figure 6). More than half of respondents reported a significant degree of growth from a global internship experience for their intercultural skills, flexibility and adaptability, confidence, communication skills, and interpersonal skills. Respondents also reported improvement in their problem-solving skills, work ethic, and teamwork, but to a lesser degree than other skills.

Global internship respondents highlighted the ways in which the environment facilitated their growth of 21st-century skills, specifically acknowledging how the global aspect of their internship was valuable and contributed to the development of soft skills essential for interactions in the workplace, including intercultural skills as well as communication, flexibility, and adaptability. The qualitative interview data build even further evidence of how the global aspect of the internship supports this development and prepares students to work in a professional capacity with others in a global context.

“What was most important from the internship experience was the soft skills. For example, interacting with a boss and coworkers who have a very different background than you do, how to communicate and deal with the office style. That is very different than what I would say U.S. office style is. I think that was the biggest and the most valuable thing to me.” (Undergraduate global intern in Jordan)

Figure 6: Reported skill development or improvement from global internship participation



The findings related to growth in 21st century workforce skills following a global education experience are similar to results from previous IIE research (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Mason et al., 2023). Intercultural skills were consistently the area of greatest growth across all three studies. Notably, while technical and computer software skills had the lowest growth across all three studies, students who participated in a global internship reported greater growth in this competency (32 percent) than their study abroad (5 percent) and language and area studies peers (18 percent). This may suggest an area where global interns are given more opportunities to develop technical and computer software skills in an internship setting than their peers and one that could also be further enhanced to build global interns’ proficiency during the internship experience.

Global Internship Alumni Employment Outcomes

Internships have long been viewed as impactful on career readiness and employability by students, universities, and enterprises. An AAC&U report found that “seven in ten employers indicated they would be either more or much more likely to hire a candidate who held a job or work-study position, completed an internship or apprenticeship” (2023). Further research has found that completing an internship helps students to “gain invaluable work experience, develop critical soft and technical skills, and build professional networks across industries and borders,” making them more lucrative to future employers and increasing their chance of finding employment upon graduation (Virtual Internships, 2024).

This section of the report provides a detailed analysis of respondents’ employment outcomes. It first outlines respondents’ current employment status. It then looks closer at the major employment sectors and industries where respondents work. Finally, it explores how respondents’ global internship connects with their occupation, identifying the ways it is viewed as an asset in their professional profile and search for employment.

Employment Status

The study found that 58 percent of survey respondents were employed, and 21 percent were pursuing further academic study. Other respondents were unemployed (10 percent), interning (5 percent), or had other responsibilities such as serving as a volunteer or caregiver. Although the overall respondent employment rate is lower than the U.S. national employment rate of 80 percent for individuals ages 25-34, when looking only at respondents ages 25-34, the proportion of employed respondents increases to 78 percent, more closely aligning with the national employment rate (NCES, 2024). The difference in the full dataset may be attributed to the timing of the survey at the end of the academic year and the respondent pool largely comprised of recent graduates who are just beginning to look at entry into the workforce. Of the 21 percent pursuing academic studies, half were completing a bachelor’s degree, and another 40 percent were enrolled in a master’s degree program.

Employment Sector

Among employed respondents, a majority (71 percent) were employed in business or private sector organizations either internationally (40 percent) or domestically (31 percent). The remaining respondents worked in government (7 percent) and education (6 percent), were self-employed (6 percent), or worked in national (4 percent) or international (4 percent) non-governmental organizations or other fields (2 percent). This breakdown is consistent across internship locations.

Employment Industry

Employed respondents have found employment across various industries, with the top three industries including hospitality and food services (15 percent), finance and insurance (9 percent), and manufacturing (8 percent). While this was consistent with those who completed international and US-based internships, for those who interned virtually, manufacturing as well as administrative and support services were matched as the number one industry, each representing 20 percent of respondents.

Many students seek an internship in an industry directly connected to their intended future career field. A comparison of the alumni internship industry and their current employment industry revealed that 56 percent of respondents found employment in the same industry, while 44 percent changed industries. For some students, the experience confirmed their interest in working in a particular industry, while for others, it allowed them to see other possibilities or determine that their internship industry was not a good fit for their career goals.

“My participation in an internship with an events venue gave me a taste of working in the hospitality industry, proving to myself that I quite enjoyed the pace, skills, and type of work that the field entails.” (Undergraduate global intern to Spain)

“I gained a clearer path of what industry I was interested in working in. I was more driven to apply to jobs post-graduation that were relevant to my internship experience, the company I worked for, and its sector in the market.” (Graduate global intern to Germany)

A notable finding was that one in four employed respondents was employed at the same organization where they completed their internship. More than half (53 percent) of these respondents had participated in an internship longer than 16 weeks, and another 33 percent had an eight – 16-week internship. Respondents were employed at their internships organization in 14 out of 18 industries, with 26 percent employed in hospitality and food services, followed by ten percent in manufacturing, and 8 percent each in finance and insurance and professional, scientific, and technical services. This indicates global internship opportunities offer a viable career pathway to students who are interested in continuing employment in the industry and country of their internship.

“I was offered a part-time role remotely following the end of my internship. After having done this for a year, I have now been offered a full-time position after completing my studies” (Undergraduate global intern to the United States).

Global Internship as an Asset for Employment

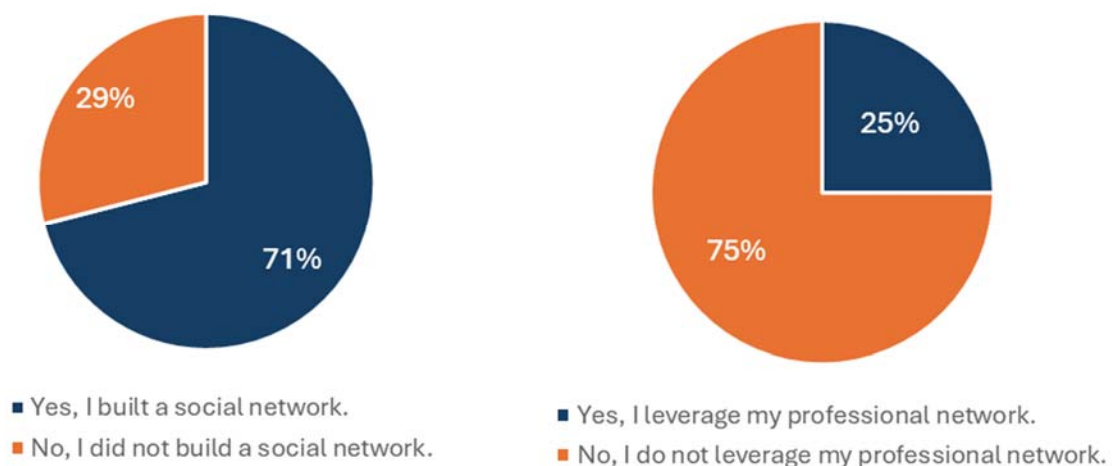
Three in four respondents confirmed that participating in an internship abroad was helpful in acquiring their first full-time job. Many shared that a global internship set them apart from their peers and served as an advantage in their employment search. As respondents moved on from their global internship into the professional and/or academic realm, many sought ways to highlight the time spent at their internship to prospective employers.

“Having that international experience, I think, gave me an edge or showed that I was taking the initiative and would do the work. [My internship placement] was a practical experience where I was given lots of responsibility to work technically. If you're making a documentary now, you'd have a whole crew of people doing lots of different things, so I was given the responsibility to organize everything and technically execute it as well myself.” (Post-graduate global intern to the United States)

Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated they included their internship abroad in their professional profile, such as on a CV, resume, biography, or LinkedIn profile. However, research shows that students must not only display the information on their job application materials, but they must also be prepared to “showcase” how they can apply the skills and knowledge gained through a global internship to a potential job (Siegfried & Ripmeester, 2024). Global internship respondents shared how they viewed their participation as an advantage when seeking employment. One alumna described how she emphasized the scope of her responsibilities at the internship to potential employers.

Many respondents mentioned their global internship in professional or academic opportunities, such as interviews or meetings (56 percent). Study abroad organizations encouraged students to build their networks, both social and professional, while participating in an internship. However, fewer respondents leveraged their professional network (25 percent) when pursuing other professional or academic opportunities (Figure 7). This is somewhat surprising as 70 percent of respondents indicated in a separate question that their participation in a global internship helped them to build social networks to launch or accelerate their professional careers. These findings point to areas where host employer organizations, study abroad organizations, and universities can partner to help students articulate their global internship experience. They can further guide students on promising networking practices, including how to expand their network while participating in the internship, and then identify ways to maintain contact with their former colleagues once the global internship has concluded.

Figure 7: Comparison of global intern built and leveraged networks



Global Internship Alumni Career Pathways

Impact on Career Goals

When reflecting on their global internship experience, 86 percent of respondents indicated that their career goals were positively affected by the experience (Figure 8). Respondents noted the global internship itself was a positive experience that enabled them to grow as individuals in numerous ways. For many, the global internship confirmed or helped them to better shape their career plans.

“Yes, my internship abroad significantly enhanced my management skills and broadened my perspective, positively impacting my career goals” (Undergraduate global intern to Lebanon).

Others commented that the global aspect expanded their career possibilities working for international organizations and helped them to understand the work environment they would like to be a part of in the future.

“I look forward to working with intercultural teams and the cultural richness and different points of view that it brings” (Undergraduate global intern to the United States).

Figure 8 Extent that a global internship affected alumni’s career goals



Global interns were offered an array of support to prepare them for their experience by their study abroad organization, which was then further bolstered by the host employer organization during their internships. For respondents who indicated a positive impact on their career goals, the research team also identified which activities were most prevalent. This is important as it identifies potential links between career pathways and global internship activities.

Among the activities offered by the study abroad organization, the activities most closely associated with positive career goals included networking events with employers, social and cultural events, interview prep support for internship placement, in-country orientation, and resume and cover letter writing support for internship application (Figure 9). It's notable that these activities were organized and

offered to students before or during the internship placement. This is a positive affirmation for organizations that continuing these activities is valuable to global interns and that organizations may want to examine activities after the internship has concluded to identify areas to improve aimed at supporting students' career goals.

Figure 9 Top study abroad organization activities associated with career goals

Study abroad organization activities
networking events with employers
social and cultural events
interview prep support for internship placement
in-country orientation
resume and cover letter writing support for internship application

Among the support facilitated by the host employer organization, the supports most closely associated with positive career goals included project-based work assignments, mentorship from a co-worker, regular feedback on assignments and/or communication, task-based work assignments, and social or cultural events. This aligns with previous research on domestic internships, which highlights the importance and value of well-designed internships that include supervisors prepared to offer mentorship and a regular feedback loop to interns (Hora et al., 2023). It also emphasizes the critical role of supervisors as engaged individuals who are available to interns and are equipped to provide a work environment that supports interns' growth.

Figure 10 Top host employer organization activities associated with career goals

Host employer organization activities
project-based work assignments
mentorship from a co-worker
regular feedback on assignments and/or communication
task-based work assignments
social or cultural events

For both the study abroad organization and the host employer organization, networking and mentorship were seen as especially impactful on future career goals. One respondent highlighted how a global internship had a direct impact on her career pathway. She leveraged her professional network during her internship to find a future opportunity.

“I got the job that I am doing now in Brazil while I was in Ghana. It was a great connection, obviously, like mentorship and networking. It wasn't a personal referral, but it was a connection of [my supervisor in Ghana] knowing about this organization and recommending it to me, based on my experience and me liking my experience at his university.” (Undergraduate global intern to Ghana)

Another respondent explained how the host employer organization supported his development of technical work alongside soft skills such as his work ethic.

“I had one big project-based work assignment, which involved regular feedback and communications with the bosses around the company. I feel like that was quite influential in helping me develop in the workplace... having a source of regular feedback and weekly meetings was really influential in my development of soft skills. It also helped me develop workplace etiquette, like understanding how things worked in an office-based environment.” (Graduate global intern to Colombia)

This evidence confirms the value of mentoring and networking on interns’ future career prospects. It further supports the need for study abroad and host employer organizations to approach these activities in ways that guide students on how to build and sustain professional relationships.

Relevance of Skills to Professional Careers

It is important not only to acquire and develop skills as part of a career pathway but also to have them relevant to one’s professional career. As such, the research team asked respondents whether the skills gained while participating in a global internship were relevant to their current professional career. 80 percent of respondents confirmed that the skills gained from their global internship experience were relevant to their careers. Global interns shared how the skills they acquired through their global internship are still ones they adapt and use in their careers.

“I was able to build soft skills like communication and leadership skills. I became more detail-oriented through the way that [my boss] had me make my schedules every day. I still use that skill now in the job that I currently have.” (Graduate global intern in the United Kingdom)

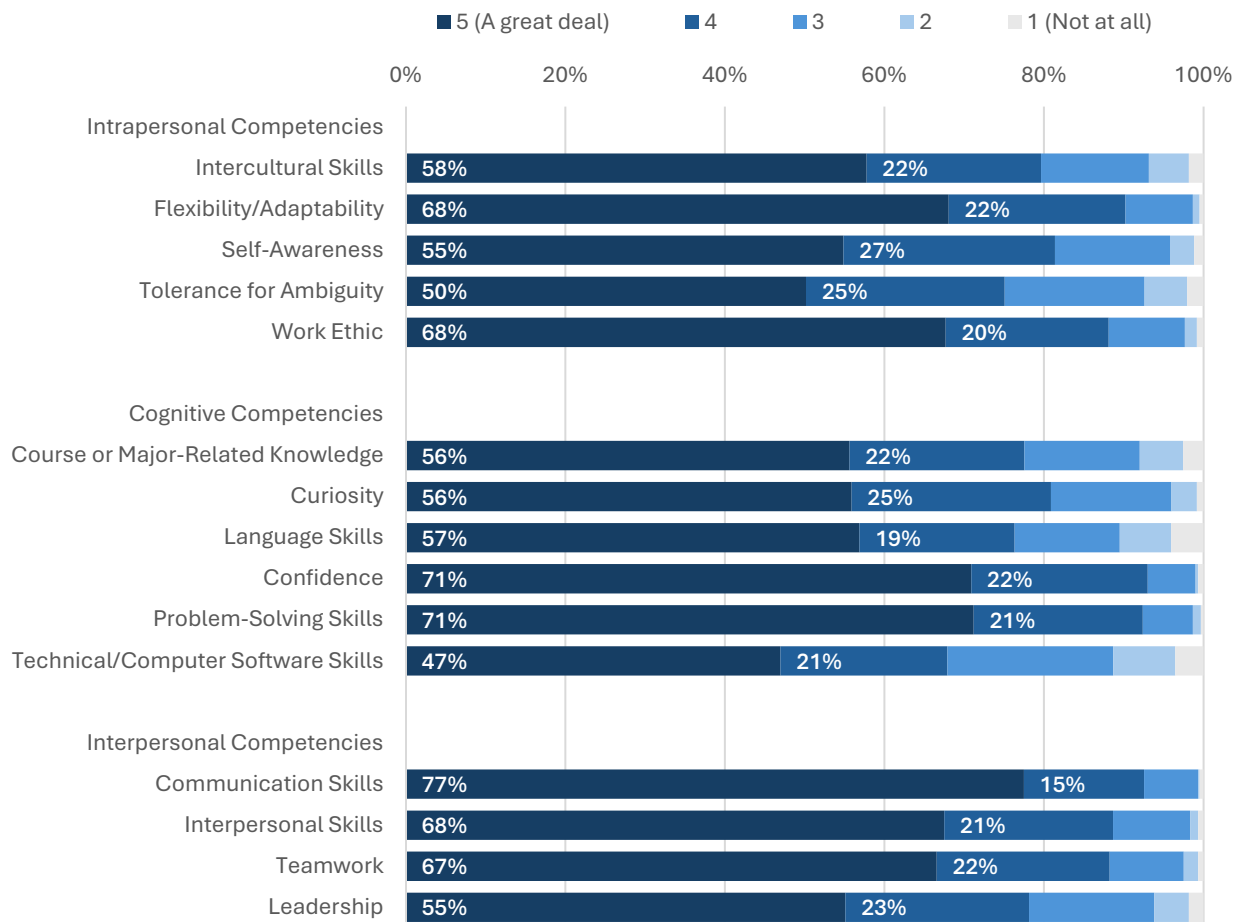
*“Today, I am COO of a company similar to the one I started as an intern during this program. On this experience, I learned the basis of my professional expertise.”
(Graduate global intern to the United Kingdom)*

Most respondents identified that in their professional careers, communication skills, problem-solving skills, confidence, interpersonal skills, teamwork, flexibility/adaptability, and work ethic had the greatest relevance. More than half of respondents felt that intercultural skills, language skills, curiosity, course-related knowledge, leadership, and self-awareness were also very relevant in their professional careers. Respondents indicated tolerance for ambiguity and technical/computer software skills as relevant in their professional careers but to a lesser degree than other skills.

The skills respondents identified as most relevant in their professional careers also align with other research studies on the skills employers identify as necessary to be successful in the workforce.

According to AAC&U employer research, communication, flexibility, and adaptability, and working effectively in teams were the most important skills for identifying strong job candidates (Finley, 2023). The AAC&U findings also note an increasing weight on the value of the ability to work with people from different backgrounds. These findings are echoed in a recent report by Colleges and Institutes Canada, which identified the top five skills Canadian employers search for in recent graduates: communication, adaptability, problem-solving, teamwork, time management, and self-management. Interestingly, respondents identified confidence among the top skills relevant to their current roles, which is not referenced in other research. Insights from several respondents through open-ended survey responses indicated that confidence was necessary to navigate cultural and linguistic matters in a foreign office environment. As such, the relevance of this skill may be unique to the global intern perspective who then seeks employment outside of their home country.

Figure 11: Relevant skills in respondents' professional careers

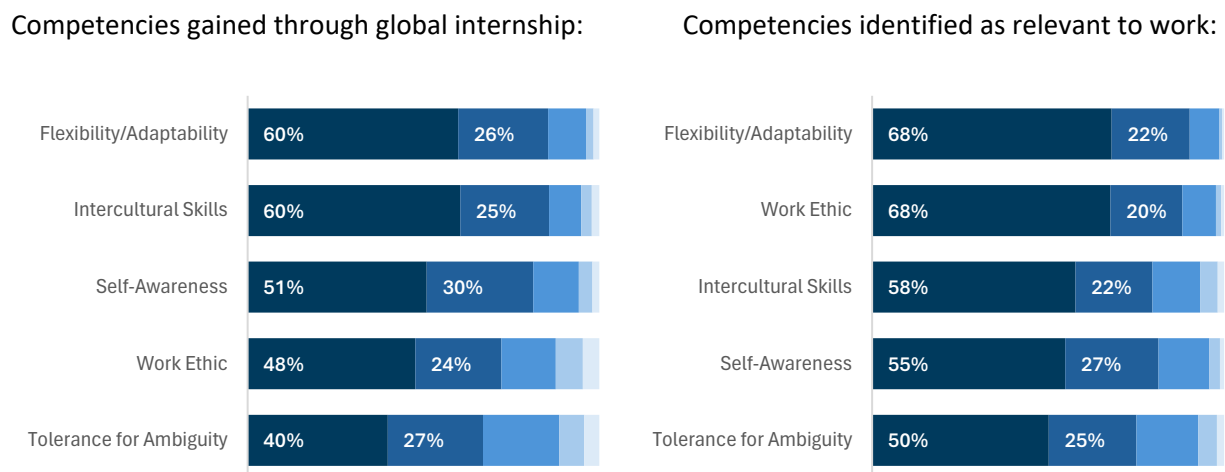


Comparison of Acquired and Relevant Skills

The research team compared which skills global interns indicated they increased during their internship and then which skills they felt were most relevant to their careers. The analysis is grouped by each type of skillset: intrapersonal, cognitive, and interpersonal.

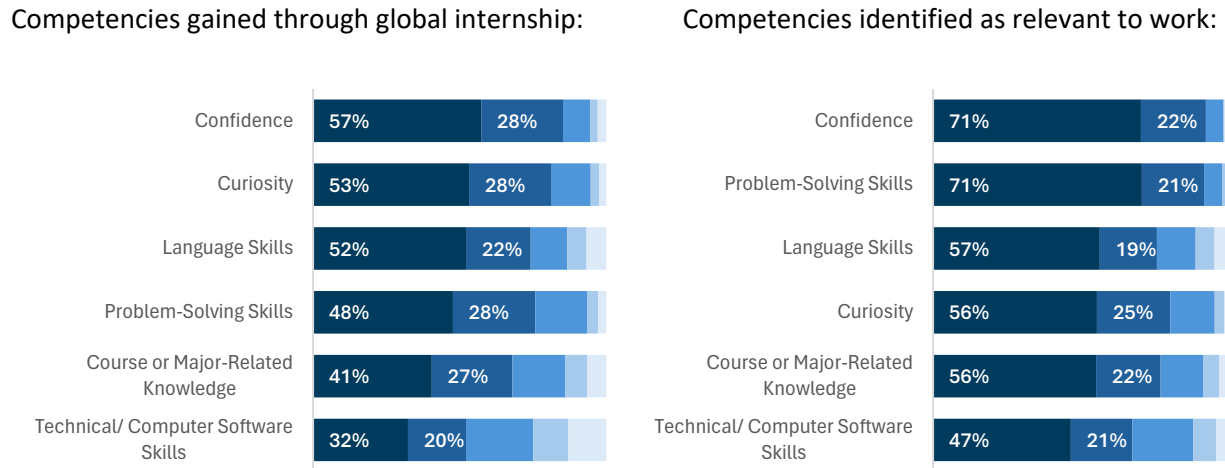
Intrapersonal Competencies. Respondents found that flexibility and adaptability at work, in addition to a strong work ethic, were the most relevant skills for work (90 percent and 88 percent, respectively) (Figure 12). While respondents indicated the highest gains in flexibility and adaptability at only 86 percent during their global internship, they noted work ethic was gained to an even lesser extent at only 72 percent. Conversely, while intercultural skills were among the most increased by global interns (85 percent), these skills were relatively less important, though still highly valued (80 percent) as relevant to work. This may point to a skill gap in terms of the soft skills related to workforce development that may be less emphasized in internship activities yet highly relevant for alumni once they enter the workforce. This finding on intrapersonal skills is similar to other IIE studies, indicating an area where activities need to intentionally address the development of this skill.

Figure 12: Comparison of intrapersonal competencies gained through global internship activities and intrapersonal competencies respondents identified as relevant to their work.



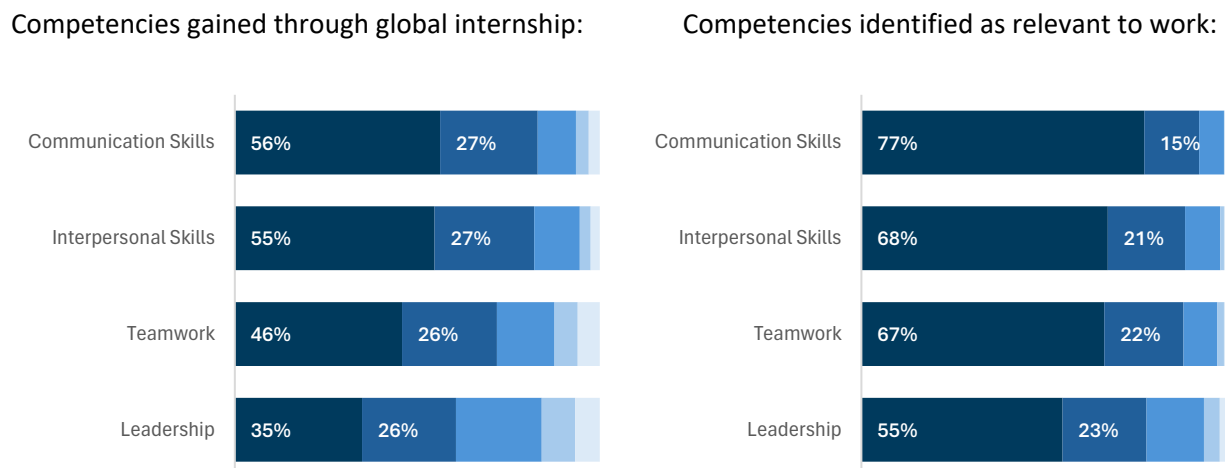
Cognitive Competencies. Respondents noted the importance of confidence (93 percent) and problem-solving skills (92 percent) in their professional work (Figure 13). While respondents indicated the highest gains in confidence at only 85 percent during their global internship, they noted problem-solving skills were gained to an even lesser extent at only 76 percent. In contrast, curiosity increased among alumni (81 percent), meeting the relative importance of this skill for work (81 percent). With the exception of curiosity, all other skills grouped under cognitive competencies were gained to a lesser extent than their relevance to work, according to alumni. This represents another possible gap in terms of skills taught or acquired as part of internship experiences and their related activities versus what is relevant to the workforce.

Figure 13: Comparison of cognitive competencies gained through global internship activities and cognitive competencies respondents identified as relevant to their work.



Interpersonal Competencies. The competencies that were highest in importance, both in acquisition and professional relevance, are the same (Figure 14). They include communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and leadership. It is positive to see that as 92 percent of respondents felt that communication skills were relevant to their work, 83 percent of alumni also felt that they had grown these skills as a result of their global internship. This alignment provides further evidence of the skills acquisition, translation, and application of skills learned during internship programming to alumni’s career pathways. In fact, given the high levels of relevance that these skills have, global internship programs could even further increase their focus on these skills through their programming.

Figure 14: Comparison of interpersonal competencies gained through global internship activities and interpersonal competencies respondents identified as relevant to their work.



The findings from this research indicate that the skills global interns acquire are relatively in line with the skills relevant to their work. As employers are also indicating their need for these 21st-century skills, many of which are soft skills related to workforce development and curiosity in the workplace,

internship programs can continue to strengthen activities and focus their approach on career pathways and outcomes.

Conclusion

The case for global internships is strong. Higher education institutions, students and parents are focused on career readiness. Employers have articulated the most important skills needed to be successful in their organizations. Global internships fill the gap, offering a high-impact practice that supports the development of the very 21st-century skills employers are seeking. This then begs the question, how is a global internship different from a domestic internship? Through this study, it was evident that students' 21st-century skill development was further enhanced by a global experience, one in which they were challenged to confidently navigate new cultural and linguistic environments as professionals and learn to work with individuals from different backgrounds.

Many students further viewed global internships as an advantage in their search for employment after graduation, particularly for those interested in working for an international organization based in their home country and for those interested in living and working outside of their home country. The relationships interns developed through their global internship experience were impactful on their career goals and potential career pathways. Host employer organization relationships with strong mentorship components and regular feedback on assignments influenced interns' skill development and expanded interns' networks. Study abroad organizations can play a role in ensuring host employer organizations are trained and well-prepared to support interns, particularly in regard to mentorship and networking. They can further develop programming to guide students on how to best leverage their time with mentors and how to build and sustain a professional network.

Global internships offer students the opportunity to explore career pathways in their industry of choice. For those committed to employment in their internship industry, the fact that one in four employed respondents is working at the organization where they interned is positive and signals a strong career pathway. The global internship experience also allows students to make a determination prior to graduation about the industry where they pursue a career. For some students, the experience confirmed they were in the correct place, and for others, it showed them different possibilities. For most students, the global internship expanded their vision of career pathways, including pathways outside of their home country.

Finally, global internships attract a more diverse pool of students than the traditional study-abroad population. For study abroad organizations, identifying ways to highlight the success stories of global interns from diverse backgrounds to prospective students and their families has the potential to shape the diversity of individuals participating in study abroad and attract an even greater number of students from underrepresented backgrounds to global internships.

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Appendix

21st Century Workforce Skills

Communication skills	The ability to convey ideas to others through verbal and written means, using clear and effective language that accounts for the audience.
Confidence	The ability to make decisions based on one's own convictions and to trust in one's own competence.
Course or major-related knowledge	Proficiency in one's chosen academic major or course content.
Curiosity	The openness to new experiences and desire to learn.
Flexibility/Adaptability	The ability to adjust one's own behavior to changing circumstances and to work in ambiguous environments. This skill includes the ability to learn and be teachable.
Intercultural skills	The ability to understand and respect different cultural contexts and viewpoints. Includes an openness to new ideas and ways of thinking.
Interpersonal skills	Having a positive attitude to get along with others that includes social awareness, the ability to listen, and display good etiquette.
Language skills	The ability to communicate in spoken and written form in a language other than English.
Leadership	The ability to leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. The ability to assess and manage one's own emotions and those of others; use empathetic skills to guide and motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.
Problem-solving skills	The ability to identify work-related problems; analyze problems in a systematic but timely manner; draw correct and realistic conclusions based on data and information; and accurately assess root cause before moving to solutions.
Self-awareness	The ability to self-reflect and understand one's own strengths and weaknesses.
Teamwork	The ability to collaborate with a diverse team, work within a team structure, and negotiate and manage conflict.
Technical/computer software skills	The ability to select and use appropriate technology to accomplish a given task, or apply computing skills to solve problems.
Tolerance for ambiguity	The ability to be comfortable with uncertainty, unpredictability, conflicting

	directions, and multiple demands. In essence, tolerance for ambiguity is manifest in a person's ability to operate effectively in an uncertain environment.
Work ethic	Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time/workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, and is able to learn from his/her mistakes.

