

# CAREER-BOOSTING STRATEGIES

## Career-Boosting Strategies For International Students Studying in North America

As an international student looking to gain career-building experience in North America, your challenge will be proving to employers that you have a solid understanding of North American business protocol and can build bridges between the local culture and your own. Your academic training may not adequately prepare you for the professional work environment. You'll need more experience to learn how to plan, organize, work in teams and understand the politics of work and leadership. Maximize your time. Get your hands dirty. Use the strategies suggested below and use your imagination!

### Connect With Local Culture

- **Socialize:** Social interaction is essential for understanding the subtleties of North American culture. Make the effort to interact – you will gain friendships while building understanding.
- **Don't get caught in the "foreign student group":** While it may be easier to socialize with other international students or people from your home country, you'll miss out on a key part of the study abroad experience. Step out of your comfort zone and meet locals.
- **Be a cross-cultural observer:** Make understanding all levels of the culture your primary objective. Observe behavior as well as work, study and social environments.
- **Be proactive:** Stay outgoing, curious, and patient. Walk where you haven't walked before, talk to new people, and have a sense of humor; some of the richest interaction is unexpected.
- **Join student groups on campus:** Join North American student groups instead of international student groups. Take risks – join groups you might not have considered before: a sports team, a debating club or the political science association.

### Volunteer for Social Interaction to Build Job Skills

- **Build cross-cultural knowledge:** Selling beer tickets side by side with local students can be just as valuable as undertaking a leadership role. Be a serious cross-cultural observer and you will gain invaluable insight.
- **Take volunteer positions that require interaction:** Social welfare organizations and other off-campus organizations will have volunteer opportunities that require one-on-one contact. These are great cross-cultural skill-building opportunities.
- **Offer your services:** Offer to work for free on a research project; become a tutor for other students; offer your services at a conference to design a database to produce nametags, invitation lists and offer to be the host for a group of delegates.

### Network with Experts

- **Contact embassies:** Call or visit embassies from your home country or region and find out which North American organizations work in your part of the world (government departments, consulting firms, NGOs, private sector organizations, etc.). Build a database of these organizations, research them, and make a special effort to contact the experts in your field who work for them.
- **Contact local experts who have links with your home country:** Offer translation or editing services for your native language, offer to be a volunteer "cross-cultural trainer" for any professional or expert preparing to travel to your home country.
- **Create a cross-cultural training course:** Develop a one- to two-hour training course about your home culture. Contact large NGOs operating in your home country for a template and course material to help you outline and research your presentation. Offer it to local experts or organizations that travel to, or work with, your home country.