

BUILDING Global Skills

Workers with Foreign Internship
and Study Experience *in High
Demand*



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As an Emory University student majoring in international studies/Spanish and minoring in journalism, **Monique Ramgoolie** had a basic career goal: to “have a job at a place where things stayed interesting and where I was able to affect change.”

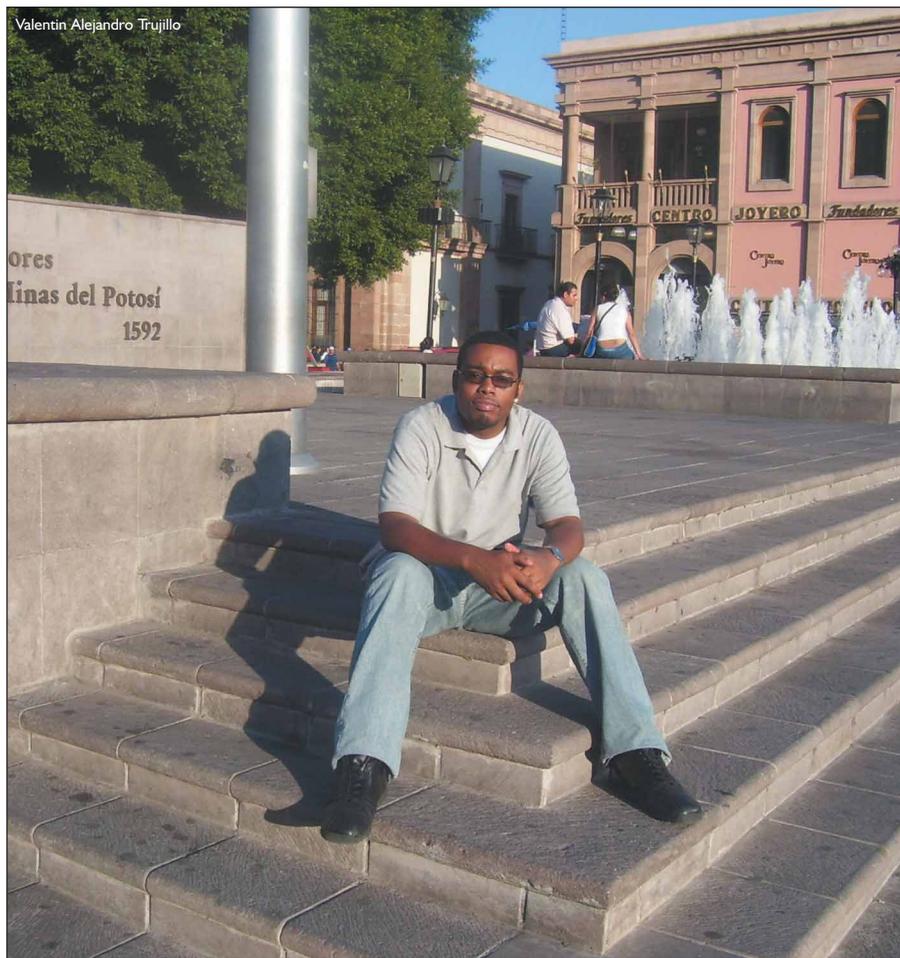
By commencement, she had already charted a course toward that goal. In addition to undertaking study-abroad stints in China and Spain, she interned at the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, and with the *Cape Times* newspaper in Cape Town, South Africa, where she attended and covered events by such global leaders as Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Providing early and lasting lessons about the excitement and rewards of working overseas with diverse populations, these impressive stepping stones in her resume helped her progress further down a fulfilling career path. She went on to successfully apply to Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, where a graduate concentration in international relations combined her interests in policy, government and foreign affairs. She took every advantage of the school's career resources, programming and funding. For example, she landed an internship with the U.S. State Department doing practical, substantive work at the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Later, through a career panel, she also discovered the Presidential Management Internship (now Fellowship), for which she was selected. This flexible program allowed Ramgoolie to explore a variety of work options within the U.S. State Department. She serves there today as a Program Officer covering migration discussions at the United Nations, in the Bureau of Population,



Courtesy M. Ramgoolie.

Monique Ramgoolie



Solomon Graham in the Plaza de Fundadores, San Luis Potosi, Mexico.

Refugees and Migration's Office of Population and International Migration – an influential role that meets her early career goal, and then some.

Strong international experience and specialized graduate study certainly give a student an edge in pursuing prestigious, globe-trotting jobs at the State Department or in intelligence work, but these aren't just advantageous for diplomats or "superspies". Demand for workers with foreign language and cultural fluencies has jumped throughout the government sector since 9/11. Ramgoolie sees "opportunities to use one's knowledge base in foreign relations or political science" in a host of federal departments including the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture, as well as in many non-governmental service organizations, nonprofits, and the private sector.

Experience of a Lifetime

As a technology major with a design background, Solomon Graham's pursuit of a network systems analyst career at first may not seem to have much to do with foreign relations, cultures and travel. But for this graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Information Studies, a few courses in Spanish and growing up near one of the city's large Hispanic neighborhoods led him to apply for a life-changing opportunity in San Luis Potosi, Mexico.

Through the university's noted Center for International Education, he combined study abroad with a social service internship. The Center's North American Conflict Resolution Program set Graham up with work experience at the State Department of Human Rights while attending the University of Autonoma.

Immersion in all-Spanish-language classes filled with unfamiliar accents

challenged and dramatically improved his language skills, which he applied along with his tech background to translation work on the State Department's website.

Far from his technology work but equally significant was the challenging field work. Graham undertook intensive study of "the structure of Mexican law, the various government offices in the city and how the departments functioned overall within the system."

The preparation was "a great way to get a feel for the socioeconomics of the region," he says. Graham was able to interact directly with lawyers, counselors and often highly distressed plaintiffs in "bizarre and sometimes disturbing cases," providing an unanticipated and uniquely rewarding opportunity to "help others through some of the most difficult moments of their lives."

Having worked hard to find, apply for and succeed in "the experience of a lifetime," Graham appreciates that his was in many ways an uncommon and lucky experience.

"It was very unusual...to undertake this exchange program, as a tech major," says Graham, now a Network Administrator Specialist with Marshall & Ilsley Bank. "But it helped me stand out among my peers in the same major."

Global Sharing for New Solutions

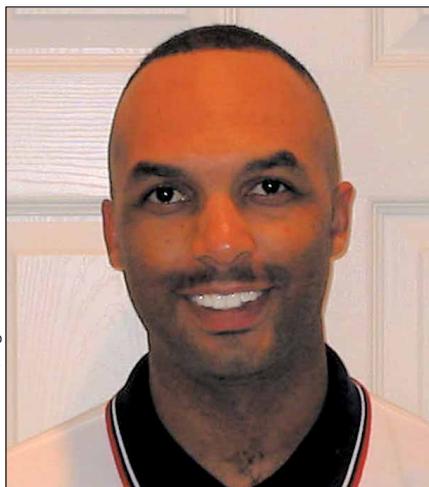
Indeed, tech and science majors who are bilingual or have international experience are in particularly high demand and short supply for employers in all sectors. The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE) is one organization trying to bridge this gap. With a mission to "develop global skills in tomorrow's technical leaders," IAESTE annually facilitates some 130 international exchanges for students in disciplines ranging from engineering to mathematics to architecture, across a network of more than 70 countries. IAESTE works with the nonprofit Association for International Practical Training (AIPT), which provides both work-abroad opportunities for U.S. stu-

dents and J-1 visa sponsorships allowing foreign students to work as trainees for U.S. employers.

For NASA radiation engineering specialist **Anthony Sanders**, his experience in Zaragoza, Spain, arranged through IAESTE, provided a lifelong lesson in the importance of sharing new technology findings with international peers. Working with fellow interns from around the world, he found that "many of them had computer programming techniques superior to mine, but were struggling with hardware design and troubleshooting, where I excelled. Working together and sharing our knowledge made us improve our problem-solving skills and demonstrated that a network of engineers were better as a team than working alone."

Taking the lesson to heart, Sanders has gone on to engage in cutting-edge radiation research at NASA, publishing and presenting it in global forums, and continuing to participate in international workshops such one in Leuven, Belgium, focusing on advancements in predicting radiation hazards related to space travel.

Stressing that any student can benefit from early work experience through internships and co-ops, whether domestic or abroad, Sanders agrees with Graham that "international experience and being multilingual do set you apart from the pack when applying for jobs."



NASA radiation engineering specialist
Anthony Sanders.

Donald K. Hawkins, NightHawk5 Productions

Underrepresented or Out-Standing

During his time in Mexico, Solomon Graham also stood apart as the only African American and the only male in the program, an experience that reflects national trends. According to "Open Doors," a study by the **Institute of International Education**, females outnumber males among U.S. study-abroad students nearly 2-to-1. Further analysis by NAFSA: **Association of International Educators** shows that African Americans are proportionally and actually among the least likely to study abroad out of U.S. demographic groups, despite comprising 11.9 percent of U.S. higher education enrollment (fall 2002 figures) – the second largest subgroup after Caucasians. African Americans represented only 3.4 percent of U.S. students abroad in the 2003-2004 school year, compared to Caucasians (83.7 percent), Asian Americans (6.0 percent) and Hispanic/Latino Americans (5.1 percent).

Possible explanations for the disparity are varied. Students may be wary of encountering discrimination abroad – as Americans and as minorities. In the post-9/11 world, being an American abroad is to be as conspicuous as ever. While it can be "a challenging and rewarding experience," as Monique Ramgoolie observes, "it may not be for everyone." Indeed, since the late '90s, the percentage of study-abroad students for nearly all groups except Asian Americans and multiracials has generally been declining, and a notable dip occurred after 9/11.

Some African-American students may also feel self-conscious about being doubly noticeable abroad. Solomon Graham enjoyed "standing out" in Mexico; he felt warmly welcomed while traveling to areas where locals were unaccustomed to meeting African-American men, "especially those so eager to learn about their country and culture."

However, while studying in Dubai, University of Cincinnati junior Brittney L. Huntley initially found it hard to confront the assumptions and

stereotypes locals held about African Americans; she describes her experiences in “My Global Study Experience in Dubai” (in this issue).

It’s also possible that some recruiters do not routinely or effectively target their global recruitment efforts to HBCUs, or media or organizations that serve African-American students. Whatever the reasons, it’s clear that too many Black collegians are still not “getting global” in ways that are increasingly important to their career prospects, whatever their field.

With this understanding, Anthony Sanders is now giving back. In addition to representing Code 500, Applied Engineering and Technology Directorate, on the NASA Goddard African American Advisory Committee, he serves as the International Rep for the Goddard chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE). In this role, he has been working to promote collaboration among NSBE, NASA and IAESTE to provide increased opportunity for other Black science and engineering students to explore careers in an exciting field that badly needs them.

Better Get Global

All things being equal, “having foreign experience is absolutely a plus” on an entry-level resume, says **Francois de Wazieres**, VP of Corporate Strategic Recruitment for L’Oreal USA. But for multinational corporations like L’Oreal, building a workforce with global skills and “international mobility” is a high priority that extends well beyond just recruitment; like diversity, it is a strategic imperative infusing all business units.

Because L’Oreal markets its products worldwide, and with considerable interchange among its headquarters in different countries, someone without any international experience has virtually zero prospects for reaching a high-level position in the organization, de Wazieres says. That doesn’t mean the company excludes talented applicants who have not had an opportunity to go abroad, but successful candidates should be ready – and eager – to do so if they land the job.

Observing that more than ten percent of the company’s employees work in a location other than their country of ori-

Tips for “Getting Global”

- 🌐 Start language study early
- 🌐 Maintain good academic standing
- 🌐 Research and apply for scholarships early
- 🌐 Have tuition ready for study abroad host-college
- 🌐 Line up good references
- 🌐 Visit both academic and career centers on campus with international opportunities, including those outside your school/major
- 🌐 Research off-campus resources like IAESTE or professional organizations for your major
- 🌐 Ask alumni of international programs about their experiences
- 🌐 Hold informational interviews with those working in your field
- 🌐 Attend career panels, talks by visiting international speakers, and similar programming
- 🌐 Have target countries in mind if asked for a preference, but don’t exclude locations you have not thought of
- 🌐 Indicate your interest and openness to foreign travel and ongoing learning in job interviews
- 🌐 If all else fails, volunteer to work at an international organization to get a foot in the door, and conduct yourself seriously as if it were a paid opportunity

gin, he advises, “If you’re going to shoot for the top, you’d *better* get global.”

Fortunately, the company is aggressive and progressive about weaving global skills-building into its professional development programs. For early-career employees who do well and are headed for advancement, “it’s a must that they should go abroad at some point with us” as a function of leadership training, says de Wazieres. (He had done stints in Europe, Israel, Turkey and Mexico.) Thus, interviewing managers look for a quality that he describes as “an openness, a curiosity,” indicating their potential for international mobility. This could be signaled by having study abroad credits or speaking more than one language, for example. But, more importantly, they seek an indication that an interviewee would be an employee who “will go into

another country with an open mind, accepting and expecting cultural differences, listening to other cultures,” and learning from the best practices their foreign colleagues have to offer.

Hurdles and Helpers

It is an optimistic sign for such companies that more and more “Millennials” they encounter at college job fairs “eagerly ask about travel and work abroad opportunities,” says de Wazieres.

Peter Franks, Executive Director of Drexel University’s Steinbright Career Development Center and past CEO of the World Association for Cooperative Education, also sees student interest increasing, and diversifying. In the Internet era, when nearly any mom-and-pop shop can conduct “multinational business,” Franks also sees a

need for global-skills students rising among smaller-sized employers, not just big multinational corporations like L'Oreal. He also says demand is "broad based," cutting across all majors, including all kinds of social and humanities endeavors. Some 4,000 Drexel students participate in co-ops each year, many of them abroad through the Center's Co-op Abroad Program. This spring, Drexel launched the Vidalakis Cretan Scholars Program, the product of a top-level fundraising initiative by the administration to support work-abroad opportunities in Crete for eight students a year, each provided with stipends of up to \$5,000.

While there are "not yet a tremendous number of programs" like Drexel's, Franks finds that more institutions are developing comprehensive work-abroad resources to meet demand, and support more diverse students' interests.

However, another reality of the post-9/11 world is that international exchanges of any kind are becoming more complicated precisely when they are as necessary as ever. As a result, universities are exploring a variety of new models to facilitate exchanges and meet demand.

Terence Miller, Director of the Overseas Programs and Partnerships office that sent Solomon Graham to Mexico, says many institutions like UW-Milwaukee are reorganizing once separate campus functions into more comprehensive, centralized or all-in-one resources that encompass study abroad, foreign internships, international student admissions, and international/global degree programs. It can be helpful for students like Graham to have one application process to arrange his foreign travel and visas, host college admission, and internship. Some centers help with "re-entry" as well, to aid the transition back to regular campus life and pursuit of future opportunities.

Nonprofits such as IAESTE, by making visa processes run more smoothly, are also helping to fill in the gaps, as are a bumper-crop of commercial businesses and websites, including *GoingGlobal.com* and *InternAbroad.com*, among others.

Waiting World

What all the former interns agree on is this: By setting early goals, maximizing resources like those described here, and putting in the hard work and planning to make it happen, students who work abroad may not only gain skills and credentials to help throughout their careers, but other life rewards they would never expect.

"Go out, explore what the world has to offer, and enjoy an experience of a lifetime," Solomon Graham urges. "The world is waiting for you!" 

Cited Resources

Univ. of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
Center for International Education
<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CIE/>

Princeton University
Woodrow Wilson School of
Public and International Affairs
<http://www.wws.princeton.edu>

Drexel University Steinbright
Career Development Center
<http://www.drexel.edu/provost/scdc/>

IAESTE United States - Association
for International Practical Training
<http://www.iaesteunitedstates.org>

U.S. Department of State
<http://careers.state.gov/student/>

Institute of International Education
"Open Doors" Study
<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>

Going Global
<http://www.goingglobal.com>

Intern Abroad
<http://www.internabroad.com>

NASA Goddard African American
Advisory Committee
<http://eeo.gsfc.nasa.gov/afroam/index.html>

Find intern profiles, additional tips, and global opportunity resources at the extended online feature:
Blackcollegian.com/issues/1stsem06

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