



Top 10 Reasons for Native Americans to Study Abroad

With the globalization of our world, the number of Native American students studying abroad is on the rise. Study abroad provides the perfect opportunity to learn about another culture, and while it might seem slightly paradoxical, many find that studying and living in another country also helps them to keep their own culture and individuality alive. Understanding other cultures will help shed a new light on your own and will help you to understand how your culture interlaces with the entire world.

When it comes to the issues you may face as a Native American, it is important to understand that you are not alone. The UN has recently acknowledged the need to support native cultures around the world. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues states that “Despite their cultural differences, the various groups of indigenous peoples around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples.” By coming together these cultures are giving each other strength and support for their individuality.

Studying abroad is just the beginning, but it is an important step to expanding your horizons. Whether you decide on Paris or Pretoria, Nepal or New Zealand, Brasilia or Berlin, there are countless reasons why you should participate in a study abroad program. Here are the top ten...

1. See the world and broaden your experience

There are so many amazing things to experience around the world. You can see different natural landscapes and climates that do not exist in America. There are historical landmarks in every country that helped shape the history of the globe. You can expand your knowledge of the world by actually being there, seeing it, touching it, and experiencing it. Pictures in text books simply do not do justice to standing under the Eiffel Tower or on the Great Wall of China. Is there a place or landmark you have always wanted to see? This is how you can understand the world in a direct, all-encompassing way.

2. Gain a new perspective on your own country

See the U.S. with new eyes. Being immersed in one country tends to give us a limited view of our world. Traveling outside the country will show you how America affects and fits into all of humanity. From the vantage point of someone else’s culture you can truly see your own. By being exposed to so many diverse traditions you will understand the significance of keeping your own traditions alive. You may come to a better understanding of how you as an individual fit into this world. Right now you have the opportunity to study in almost every corner of the globe. As a college student, there is no better time to see the world and learn about your self in the process. These experiences will shape the rest of your life.

3. Explore other indigenous cultures

Study abroad programs that specifically focus on interaction with indigenous cultures around the world are starting emerge. You can have a cross-cultural experience with an aboriginal tribe of Australia, or come to know the peoples who are native to Central America or even East Asia. Most countries have a First People, and each group is distinctly unique to their area. You can learn about their customs and traditions while sharing your own. See how these cultures are different or surprisingly similar to your own. Find out how they have been able to interact with the settlement of incoming cultures. You may discover invaluable insights from those who have experienced a similar history. You may also find that you share some of the same ideals or the same challenges and that you can learn from one another. Finding common ground can only make you stronger and more equipped to fulfill your future ambitions.



4. Gain new insights and outlooks through new relationships

The relationships formed while studying abroad might become some of the deepest friendships you will ever develop. You will have the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds and cultures, and some of these people may even become life-long friends. Study abroad returnees often report meeting others with whom they expected to have no common ground, and then discovering that, despite being from different parts of the globe, they have much in common and much to learn from one another. These relationships, insights, and outlooks are a critical part of the study abroad experience.

5. Fight stereotypes by educating others

Native Americans may find they are faced with unique challenges as they travel abroad. Many countries around the world may only have had experience with Native Americans through movies, television, historical text or popular novels. You may find that you stand out or are the subject of curiosity. Try not to be offended, but instead use this as a unique opportunity to educate others about who you are as a person, a tribe, a nation, and an American. You can illustrate your own experiences in the United States in comparison to what others see and hear.

Another challenge you may face would be in countries with a well established indigenous group. Here you may find yourself faced with the same stereotypes that the indigenous group is faced with, or you may find that the complete opposite is true. You could be viewed as purely an American and an outsider to that group. Either way, this is an opportunity for you to break down any negative presuppositions and to who you really are. This is your chance to be an individual as well as a representative of your culture, and to encourage positive understanding of global diversity.

6. Dispel your own stereotypes

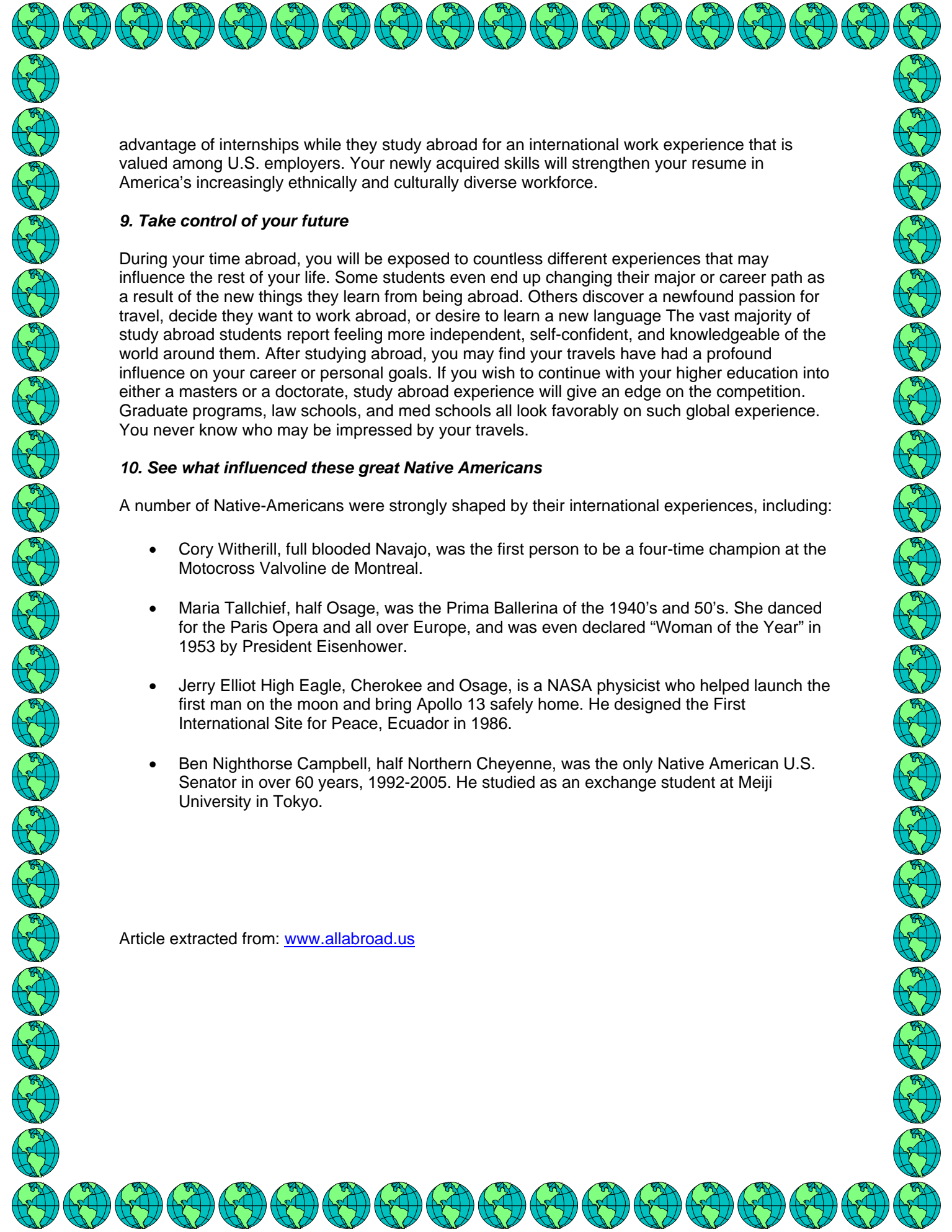
Former Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, half Northern Cheyenne, stated that, “We need to create a forum for redemption, tolerance, sensitivity.” Living in another country can often serve as such a forum. In addition to being a cultural ambassador to dispel other’s misconceptions, studying abroad gives you a chance to break down some of your own stereotypes about other countries and peoples. Not only will you have the chance to immerse yourself in another culture, you will also meet people from different backgrounds and make personal connections with people whom you may have never expected. Try to enter these foreign places with the same open mind and heart that you would appreciate in return.

7. Become a full-time learner

While studying abroad you will have the opportunity to truly become a full-time student. Traveling outside the United States will be an education in itself. Many students who go abroad report that in addition to enjoying and learning in their classes during the week, they learn some of the most valuable lessons outside of the classroom. Weekend excursions to museums and cultural sites also add to your academic and personal growth. You learn to interact with people who may not necessarily think or communicate like you. While in a foreign country, even mundane activities – like shopping for groceries – become educational experiences.

8. Improve your professional and financial potential

International experience is a critical and impressive part of any resume. In addition to the personal growth you’ll undergo while overseas, the international and cross-cultural skills you’ll develop will certainly expand your employment opportunities and, consequently, your income potential. Globally-minded employees are in high demand. Many companies seek out individuals with multi-lingual and multi-cultural experience and skills. Additionally, students can also take



advantage of internships while they study abroad for an international work experience that is valued among U.S. employers. Your newly acquired skills will strengthen your resume in America's increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse workforce.

9. Take control of your future

During your time abroad, you will be exposed to countless different experiences that may influence the rest of your life. Some students even end up changing their major or career path as a result of the new things they learn from being abroad. Others discover a newfound passion for travel, decide they want to work abroad, or desire to learn a new language. The vast majority of study abroad students report feeling more independent, self-confident, and knowledgeable of the world around them. After studying abroad, you may find your travels have had a profound influence on your career or personal goals. If you wish to continue with your higher education into either a masters or a doctorate, study abroad experience will give an edge on the competition. Graduate programs, law schools, and med schools all look favorably on such global experience. You never know who may be impressed by your travels.

10. See what influenced these great Native Americans

A number of Native-Americans were strongly shaped by their international experiences, including:

- Cory Witherrill, full blooded Navajo, was the first person to be a four-time champion at the Motocross Valvoline de Montreal.
- Maria Tallchief, half Osage, was the Prima Ballerina of the 1940's and 50's. She danced for the Paris Opera and all over Europe, and was even declared "Woman of the Year" in 1953 by President Eisenhower.
- Jerry Elliot High Eagle, Cherokee and Osage, is a NASA physicist who helped launch the first man on the moon and bring Apollo 13 safely home. He designed the First International Site for Peace, Ecuador in 1986.
- Ben Nighthorse Campbell, half Northern Cheyenne, was the only Native American U.S. Senator in over 60 years, 1992-2005. He studied as an exchange student at Meiji University in Tokyo.

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