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## Working Abroad: Same but Different

*By Stephanie Slowinski*

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to work as an actuary outside of the United States? Do you dream of living in Europe and being able to travel to different countries on the weekends? Do you wonder if the work environment would be different in another country? Would the work would be the same or completely different?

About six months ago I was given the opportunity of a lifetime. My company began an international rotation program for actuarial students. The company selected nine students from the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Australia to take part in two year international rotations. I moved from Schaumburg, Ill. to Zürich, Switzerland and began my rotation abroad this March.

Working in a new country is a great opportunity to take the skills you've learned so far in your actuarial career and apply them in a new role. It also gives you an opportunity to broaden your world view and gives you experience working in a new legal environment. Adjusting to a new working culture can be tough at first, but it is a great way to enhance your professional and interpersonal skills.

In general, the work is the same, there is a different mix of business; for example I worked a great deal with Workers Compensation Insurance in the United States, and this type of business is not written in Europe. Also, insurance in the United States is much more capital intensive and this affects underwriting and reserving methods, but at the end of the day it's all still loss ratios, interest rates, profitability targets, IBNR, etc.

Knowing a foreign language is helpful in finding a job abroad, but it is by no means necessary. There are many opportunities in the United Kingdom and many corporate offices in Europe are English speaking. At my company's headquarters in Zürich, business is conducted in English. I work in a Swiss branch office, so this is a German speaking office. For me, this has been the hardest part about the rotation, but also the most rewarding.

I worked in a big office in the United States and I had a great support system studying for exams. There were always several other students studying for the same

exam and we studied together often. I am still taking U.S. exams in Switzerland, and luckily CAS and SOA exams are offered here, but most of my co workers are on the Swiss exam system and are taking very different exams at completely different times of the year. I am much more on my own as far as setting a study schedule and I do not have the same support system that I had in the United States. I'm still able to take study time, but it has been a big adjustment.

In the United States I often used my lunch break to run errands, go to the gym, or study. I brought a lunch and ate at my desk and occasionally went out to lunch with some of my colleagues. Sometimes I would take my lunch break at 11a.m. and other times at 1p.m. In my new office we eat together as a team in the cafeteria every day at 11:30 a.m. sharp and afterwards we have a coffee. That's the way it is. In the United States I was used to working in a cubicle. Here I work in a small open office with the other four members of my team. At first it was an adjustment and I felt like I had no privacy, but after a little while I realized that this set up really promotes collaboration and I feel much more at ease asking my colleagues questions.

If you are interested in having the opportunity to work abroad it is helpful to work for an international company with offices outside the United States. It is easier to begin working for a company in the United States and look for international rotational opportunities or internal positions available abroad. It is very difficult to obtain a working visa on your own or once you have already moved outside of the United States. My rotation was part of an official international rotation, but if you work for an international company you might be able to find open positions abroad that you can apply for.

My suggestion would be not to look for a job abroad directly after graduating. It's much harder to find a job abroad directly especially without job experience. For those of you still in college considering a job abroad, I would suggest that you find a job in the United States, make some good connections, and if you work for a company with offices abroad, make sure that your manager knows that you are interested in working abroad if an opportunity comes up. You just never know!