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American Academics Abroad

15 career stories from US academics who have found great career options overseas

Introduction

American academics, the world is your oyster. Really!

Whether you're looking for a way out of endless short-term adjunct positions, needing to get closer to the topic of your research, or seeking the penultimate career-crowning senior post, working at an overseas university could be just the ticket.

In this ebook, jobs.ac.uk – the leading international jobs board for academic, research, science and related professions – tells the stories of 15 American academics who have taken the risks, and reaped the rewards. They range from recent PhD graduates in the early stages of their careers to highly experienced professors who could have their pick of positions. Each has his or her personal reasons for working abroad, and all offer tips and encouraging words for others who would like to follow their lead.

If reading their stories of academic adventure inspires you, jobs.ac.uk is the perfect place to start your search. You'll find additional information about getting into overseas academic careers in the Resources section at the end of this ebook.

Whatever your discipline, wherever your destination, we wish you the best of luck – if the 15 academics profiled here can do it, so can you!

Contents

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Dr. Liz Jackson

" Where I am now, students work very hard and are diligent and respect higher education. "


The University of Hong Kong

Dr. Liz Jackson is Deputy Director of the Masters in Education programme at the University of Hong Kong, where she is an Assistant Professor. She holds an MPhil from Cambridge, and earned her PhD at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She teaches educational theory, sustainable education and multicultural education.

Dr. Liz Jackson has been a bit of a globetrotter: a post at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates, working as a consultant on education policy for the government of South Africa, and now teaching at the University of Hong Kong. It was the dearth of opportunities as a newly-minted lecturer in education stateside at the height of the economic crash that turned her thoughts towards working abroad:

"My first year on the job market was 2008. I applied for more than 50 jobs in my major field but there were few in my specialism. I had a handful of interviews, but they were for jobs that were not closely related to my expertise. In any case, the vast majority of jobs that I applied for were not filled that year due to budget cuts—no one was hired. It felt like a lottery, as there would be 500-1000 applications for each job. It was like putting my name in a hat."

Like many young academics, however, there was more to choosing to apply overseas than just broadening her search for that elusive great academic job. Dr. Jackson and her husband had met while finishing their PhDs, and hoped to find time to enjoy their relationship as well as their careers. Although some US universities practice dual-hiring for academic couples, that usually only occurs with senior academics.

"By finding work overseas we were able to make the most of our educations while also staying together—which would have been impossible in the USA," she says.

The benefits have been many. *"My quality of life seems to be higher than that of counterparts in the USA in my field—I am more able to go to conferences, get funding for my research, I teach less, and I live in a very safe society with hardly any violent crime and wonderful infrastructure," she says. "I travel more within the USA these days than most of my US-based colleagues do, due to better job benefits, including salary." She also cited living an international lifestyle as a major plus: "I like being different and being surrounded by fascinating cultural differences, it makes life interesting."*

"There can be cultural challenges, such as prejudice or ignorance about my identity from local people, or cross-cultural communication and workplace differences," she cautions. "However, this is not a big deal in the scheme of things, and like any work challenges you can just complain with friends about it and blow off steam."

Like many other US academics working in Asia, she has needed time to get used to students who may be quieter and less outspoken than their American counterparts. *"Where I am now, students work very hard and are diligent and respect higher education,"* she says. *"However, the way they communicate in class can be different, and we do not share the same expectations when it comes to having in-class discussions, for example."*

Working overseas can be a life-changing experience, says Dr. Jackson:

"I have had opportunities to meet more specialists in my area and develop a global perspective. Learning new things is always intellectually enriching, and I have no choice but to constantly learn new things while living abroad."

Academics who are considering an overseas job search should prepare carefully, Dr. Jackson notes. While many overseas universities are in the process of internationalising their curriculum and so put a high value on US perspectives, they want candidates with something tangible to offer—such as a strong publication record and proven teaching and research experience.

Be ready to answer questions about your motivation, she adds.

"Employers are going to want to know why you want to move to that location, your knowledge of the place, and any knowledge relevant to your field," she says. *"They won't want to gamble on someone with no international experience or no clear rationale for moving across the world to their community, so see it as a process, step by step. Do some overseas university visits or fieldwork and make connections. Employers want to make sure the person they hire is resilient to challenges and sticks around for a while."*

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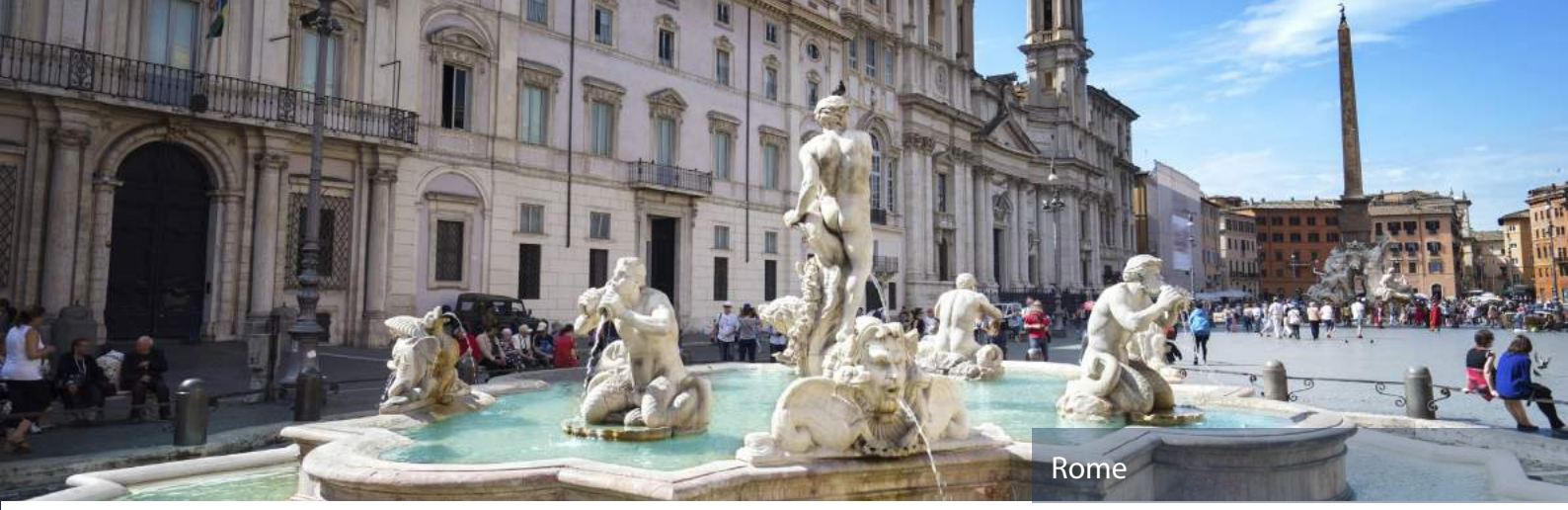
Professor Carlos Dews

" I have had much more experience teaching in a truly culturally and linguistically diverse atmosphere. I am now more flexible and sensitive toward differences. "


Rome

Professor Carlos Dews teaches English at John Cabot University in Rome, and is also a widely published fiction and non-fiction author. He holds an MA and PhD in American Literature from the University of Minnesota, and an MFA in Creative Writing from New School University in New York. He is the chair of John Cabot's English Literature department, and Director of the university's Institute for Creative Writing and Literary Translation.

All it took to convince Professor Carlos Dews that working overseas was for him was a brief stint abroad as a freelance writer, moonlighting as an online university instructor. *"I found that I enjoyed the expat life, so I began to look for academic work outside the US,"* he says. *"At the time I found my position here in Rome, I was surprised at how easy it was. I applied for only two positions, was a finalist for both jobs, and was offered one."*

Having landed in Italy, he wasted no time in making himself truly at home. Indeed, one of his main tips for US academics is to stay out of the "expat bubble"*: "Don't live in an American or English-language enclave, learn the local language, quickly and as well as possible, immediately,"* he says. *"They shouldn't expect their experience abroad to be the same as their experiences at home. In other words, don't expect everything to be like in America, and don't be critical when things are not like in America."*

For Professor Dews, the key to enjoying life as an overseas academic has been *"learning Italian, becoming immersed in Italian culture (I am now married to an Italian and feel that I am part of an Italian family), and having the opportunity to travel widely in Europe."*

He notes that having lived abroad previously helped to make the transition easier, but being flexible about living conditions and cultural differences is also important.

That's not to say that all cultural differences are a joy, of course. *"My biggest frustrations have been in dealing with Italian bureaucracy,"* he says. *"Learning Italian and developing zen-like patience in confronting the at-times infuriating bureaucracy have helped."* Although Professor Dews did not mention it, as in an American-run university it does not apply, there has also been a longstanding issue regarding foreign lecturers ("lettori") at Italian universities receiving less favourable terms than colleagues from Italy, including being offered only fixed-term contracts or being placed in a lower pay grade.

"When taking a chance on working in a new country, it certainly helps when you have a chance to teach dedicated students. Taking a post in an American university in Europe means having a mix of American students and students from the rest of the world, and comparisons are tempting" says Professor Dews.

When taking a chance on working in a new country, it certainly helps when you have a chance to teach dedicated students.

Taking a post in an American university in Europe means having a mix of American students and students from the rest of the world, and comparisons are tempting, says Professor Dews.

"My European students seem much more motivated and more dedicated students than my American students," he says. *"American students, on average and excepting the very good American students who prove exceptional, seem to be surprisingly unprepared for university work and often have less than serious attitudes toward their studies."*

However, Professor Dews' university, like most European universities, provides them with ample opportunities to see the world in a new way, get out of their comfort zones, and find a passion for learning. This holds true for lecturers as well, he adds: *"I have had much more experience teaching in a truly culturally and linguistically diverse atmosphere. I am now more flexible and sensitive toward differences."*


Italy

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Dr. Danielle Mincey-White

" The most profound effect has been the network of professionals interested in collaborating on developing human capital for the sport industry here in the Gulf Region, and in the UAE specifically. "

Sheikh Zayed Mosque, Abu Dhabi

Dr. Danielle Mincey-White is an Associate Professor in the College of Business Administration at the American University in the Emirates, where she currently directs the university's Sports Management programme. She holds a PhD in Sports Administration from Florida State University, and an MEd from Xavier University. She has taught at a number of US universities, and cites the use of applied research methods in the development of sports management curricula and programmes as her main research interest.

The sport industry is growing worldwide, but perhaps nowhere quite as quickly as the Gulf region, where oil-rich states are investing their cash for increased global prestige today but also thinking about post-oil commercial possibilities. For former athlete, coach, manager and now Sports Management academic Dr. Danielle Mincey-White, that made American University in the Emirates the perfect destination.

Applying for overseas posts was surprisingly easy, she says. First contact was often made via LinkedIn, and universities responded quickly to her enquiries and application submissions. Although she had 16 years of teaching experience under her belt, Dr. Mincey-White feels that her practical experience played a key role in the selection.

"I am a seasoned professional in the field of sport management," she says. *"I have been an athlete, coached athletes, and served as an Executive Director of a non-profit which specializes in youth sport. All of these factors, I believe, contributed to my being selected for the position that I now hold."* Her past work as a life coach has no doubt also been helpful when it comes to motivating and supporting students. Dr. Mincey-White had always hoped to live and work overseas.

Now that she has landed a fantastic post, she is making the most of the opportunity to learn about another culture. *"The major difference between students here and US students is that local students do not leave the family home until marriage,"* she says. *"Another difference is that students here have many stamps in their passports. In the US the number of students who travel abroad to study is miniscule compared to students here."* Their experience of travel and exposure to other cultures enriches classroom discussions.

Of course there are also challenges, especially when it comes to language. *"Fortunately, the United Arab Emirates is a country where English is spoken by many, especially in government positions,"* she says, adding that *"the best way for me to deal with the issue is to learn the language."* And she is now doing just that. Learning about other aspects of the culture in the Emirates has been a truly gratifying experience, she added.

The American University in the Emirates is just one of several universities—most set up with partners from outside the region—located in Dubai International Academic City (DIAC). American, British, Australian, European and Asian universities are all represented, and serve a 400,000-strong student body Drawn from across the Middle East and beyond. With the 18 million square foot DIAC campus housing so many fast-growing higher education institutions, it has become a magnet for US academics seeking an overseas post.

The high activity level within the sports industry in the UAE has provided an energy boost for her career, Dr. Mincey-White says:

"The most profound effect has been the network of professionals interested in collaborating on developing human capital for the sport industry here in the Gulf Region, and in the UAE specifically." She expects this network and her experience to have a lasting effect that will have resonance for years, no matter where her work takes her in future.

For those who are wavering, Dr. Mincey-White offers encouragement. Not only is there work out there to be found, but the cultural differences are not as daunting as you might think.

"Leave all expectations at home," she says. "Be open to the new culture."

Abu Dhabi Emirates Palace

Professor Kevin Jon Heller

" At Auckland, I had the nicest colleagues imaginable and an amazingly diverse group of students. "

Professor Kevin Jon Heller has a PhD in law from Leiden University, a JD with distinction from Stanford Law School, an MA in Literature from Duke University, and an MA and BA in Sociology from the New School for Social Research. Currently Professor of Criminal Law at SOAS (the School of Oriental and Asian Studies), University of London, he was until 2014 Associate Professor & Reader at Melbourne Law School, where he also served as Project Director for International Criminal Law at the Asia Pacific Centre for Military Law, a joint project of Melbourne Law School and the Australian Defence Force.

From degrees at top US universities, to posts in Melbourne, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand, to his current professorship at SOAS in London, Professor Kevin Jon Heller has probably racked up an impressive air miles balance. He has also turned his international experience into a solid career, capped by a top post with a world-leading university.

Although he was eager to experience life in another culture, his academic specialities– comparative criminal law and international criminal law (ICL)—also exerted a strong pull. *"In terms of the former, the very nature of the discipline counselled not spending my academic career in the US,"* he says. *"American criminal law is remarkably insular, generally cut off from (and uninterested in) the criminal law of other countries, whether common-law or civilian – much less Islamic criminal law or Chinese criminal law. Could I really consider myself a good comparativist if I had never experienced a different criminal-law tradition first-hand? The answer seemed obvious."*

As for international criminal law, he said, there were so few ICL scholars in the US that he really hungered for the chance to work in an intellectual community of researchers and lecturers who shared his keen interest.

While the rigorous criteria for obtaining a lectureship in law are the same overseas as in the US, the application procedure is definitely different, he says:

"Most obviously, hiring is completely decentralised: you have to apply for each position individually; you can't just fill out a FAR (Faculty Appointments Register) form and then wait for interviews to roll in. That means you have to constantly keep track of what positions are opening up (thanks jobs.ac.uk!) and what the law school in question expects in an application – which inevitably, and annoyingly, differs at every university. In short, if you want to teach outside of the US, you have to be much more entrepreneurial than you do if you are limiting your job search to the US."

"The actual interview process is also quite unlike the US standard. Rather than spending a whole day interviewing with faculty and giving a lengthy job-talk, his interviews for overseas posts have included an eight-minute job-talk and a formal hour-long interview with law faculty and other university representatives. The most typical format, he says, is a short job-talk where you are expected to focus primarily on future research and teaching."

"The biggest barrier has been getting rapidly up to speed on the national law of each country as soon as he starts working there. While the US, Australia, New Zealand and the UK all have common legal roots, they certainly each have their quirks and differences.

It's typical for a professor hired to teach comparative law or ICL to be expected to take on a core module covering standard national law as well, so be ready to master new material. In addition, law lecturers should expect to be teaching at least some undergraduates, since the basic law qualification in most countries outside the US is still the LLB."

What does he think about his three overseas posts? *"I have had the good fortune of being associated with excellent law schools in exceptional cities,"* he says:

- *"At Auckland, I had the nicest colleagues imaginable and an amazingly diverse group of students – nearly 25% of the Auckland study body is Maori or Pacific Islander. And Kiwi colonial legal history is absolutely fascinating."*
- *"Melbourne is one of the world's great law schools and is positively overrun with international lawyers – more than 20, at least three or four of whom are specifically interested in ICL. My students were also exceptional, if less diverse than my Auckland students. Melbourne is also an amazing place to live, ridiculously expensive but full of culture and intellect and spectacular coffee."*
- *"SOAS, my current home, is a truly unique institution; I doubt there is another law school in the world with a more diverse faculty and student body. And, of course, London is London – difficult, pricey, and wonderful. I love living in such a global, diverse city."*

"It would have been easier to stay in the US and teach the same course over and over," Prof Heller says, noting that he has lost count of the number of times he has had to quickly prepare new course materials, *"but there is no better way to learn a new legal system than having to teach it – so my new course preps have made me a far better scholar."*

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Dr. Devon Campbell-Hall

" Here, students sometimes fail. If they choose not to do the work, they will not pass… Colleagues of mine from the US tell me this rarely happens in their units. "

Southampton Docks

Dr. Devon Campbell-Hall is a lecturer in English at Southampton Solent University in the UK. She holds a BA in English from Chapman University in California, and an MA in English: Contemporary Literature and PhD, both from the University of Winchester. Her research interests include postcolonial literature, disability studies; contemporary Anglophone literature and short stories, and minority American literature.

It's funny what happens when American students get a chance to study overseas. Sometimes what was meant to be just a semester abroad turns into a life-changing, destination-rearranging experience. Such was the case for Dr. Devon Campbell-Hall, who first came to the UK on an undergraduate exchange. Two years later, married to a UK citizen, she came back to stay.

Currently course leader for undergraduate English at Southampton Solent University, she is absolutely satisfied with her choice. *"I love my life, my job, and the family/niche we've created here,"* she says. *"The students are my complete joy and I could not imagine working in any other profession."*

One surprise for US lecturers will be that while improving pass rates is certainly a topic of concern at British universities, the solution to the problem does not include making it easy for everyone to succeed. "Here, students sometimes fail." "If they choose not to do the work, they will not pass," she says. "Colleagues of mine from the US tell me this rarely happens in their units."

Students coming to Southampton Solent from abroad often think they are in for an easy ride, she adds. *"The US/Canadian students are generally more confident and more demanding, and always shocked when the grades they earn here are lower than those they would have been given in similar US institutions,"* she notes. "*They often say, 'This is so much easier than the courses we do in the US/Canada,' largely because they are used to continual assessment, whereas in the UK, we tend to have only one or two assessments per module, so they are more heavily weighted. This explains their shock upon receiving their final grades!"*

Dr. Campbell-Hall notes that working overseas is not necessarily a ticket to riches. *"The pay in the UK for academics is substantially lower than in the US, but I wouldn't change my life for anything,"* she says. The other main downside," she says, is *"pedantic focus on procedure—but again, this is international and occurs everywhere."*

"One added attraction is that UK academics tend not to be quite so fixated on showing off their academic titles, she adds. *Almost all lecturers have a PhD or are working on one, but the title of "Professor" is something one usually doesn't earn until close to the end of a long career. Indeed, progression in the UK system is for most lecturers a journey along milestones set by the national salary spine. In addition, the "star professor" who rarely appears on campus is not a frequent figure of British campus life."*

Dr. Jeffrey Kahan

“ I can’t even begin to imagine the counter-factual of what my life would have been like had I not studied and worked abroad. ”

Birmingham - UK

Dr. Jeffrey Kahan has built his career around Shakespearean scholarship, but in his role as Professor of English at the University of La Verne Los Angeles he also covers literary topics that range from gothic novels to comic books and censorship. He has a Masters in Leadership and Management from La Verne, and a Masters and PhD from the University of Birmingham.

Dr. Jeffrey Kahan first came to Europe as an MA student, thrilled at the chance to spend his summers backpacking across Spain, France, Greece and Italy. Upon graduating in 1991, he didn't want to leave—but finding a post proved to be harder than expected in that pre-Internet era. He sent off speculative applications to dozens of universities around Europe, and started with a post in rural France. *"As this was a temporary gig, I continued to apply to other parts of the world that I wanted to visit,"* he says. *"A year later, I was in Hong Kong. Another amazing and richly-rewarding experience."*

It provided opportunities for personal growth as well as career satisfaction, he stresses:

"The real joy of living in a far-off land is the reinvention of self. In France, I remember sitting alone in my one-room apartment, thinking, 'if I died right now, no one would find my body for weeks and no one would much care.' Instead of being glum, I realized that I had a unique opportunity to reinvent myself. I had no one to impress and no one to judge me. I thought I'd look stupid in cycling shorts, but since I was invisible, what did I care? I bought the tight shorts and a bike. In Hong Kong, I studied Zen and Tai Chi, visited temples, and hiked the islands on the weekends."

Experiences like these no doubt do more to build character than yet another year of slogging away as an adjunct on a temporary contract.

"I can't even begin to imagine the counter-factual of what my life would have been like had I not studied and worked abroad," says Dr. Kahan. *"I see myself as a global citizen, and think that my travels have also made me more socially flexible and certainly more environmentally aware. No matter who we think created it or should control it, we have but one planet."*

One thing that US academics abroad will certainly encounter is students and colleagues who are highly critical of their home country. *"America is often viewed abroad as an empire, no different than any other empire,"* he says. *"It's best to listen and simply realize that most people have no direct say in America's global decisions. That said, I fully believe that America has done far more good in the world than bad; it has served its own interests, to be sure, but it has also brought freedom, wealth, and tech to much of the world."* Academics working abroad do have a chance to act as global ambassadors, showing the better side of their country of origin.

Dr. Kahan says he enjoyed the huge differences between the students he worked with in France and Hong Kong. In France, there was practically no hierarchy between students and staff, and he found himself going out for drinks with those he taught.

In Hong Kong, however, there were barriers to surmount. *"Often, they asked to take pictures with me,"* he says. *"I thought they saw me as a curiosity, but I soon learned that this was a way of incorporating and accepting me into their world."*

After a few years working away, Dr. Kahan returned to the US, where he now works as a Professor of English at the University of La Verne in Los Angeles. He continues to pursue the interest in Shakespeare that originally brought him to England all those years ago—and can regale his students with real-life anecdotes about the places where Shakespeare lived and worked, surely something that gives him an edge on any competition.

His overseas experience was formative, he says, and no impediment to building a solid career in the US later on. It also had personal benefits: *"Traveling and working abroad will certainly allow you to learn about other cultures. You might even learn something about yourself, if you check your ego."*

William Shakespeare

Dr. Tricia Striano

" The cross-cultural perspective and my international collaborators, collaborations and friendships have been most rewarding. "

City University of New York

Since earning an MA and PhD in Psychology at Emory University, Dr. Tricia Striano has amassed a long list of academic awards and honours. Previously Head of the Neurocognition and Development group at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences and the Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Leipzig in Germany, she is currently Associate Professor at Hunter College, City University of New York, where she specialises in child development.

When one of the best research institutes in your field has a post going, how can you not apply? *"I learned about an opportunity from a colleague at the Max Planck Institute, so I applied for the position,"* explains Dr. Tricia Striano, an expert in social cognition and learning in infancy. *"My intention was not to go abroad, but I could not say no to the Max Planck Institute—it is one of the best places in the world for doing research."*

Dr. Striano says she was at the right place in her life and her career to be a good fit for the Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences institute, which is based at the University of Leipzig in Germany. *"I was determined, hardworking, persistent, had a strong record, and had an open mind and spirit,"* she says. *"I had no constraints."*

The reward was world-class research infrastructure, including help with generating and supporting research as well as facilities. *"The cross-cultural perspective and my international collaborators, collaborations and friendships have been most rewarding,"* she says, adding that she *"enjoyed travelling around the world and leading an international group."*

The experience not only changed her career, it changed her way of thinking:

I learned to think differently and see resources where many saw none. Due to my international experience, I do not live or think in a closed box (or in a closed office or department.) By working abroad… I minimised the risk of being a close-minded, angry and depressed scholar... I am always just a phone call away from an innovative international colleague and research collaboration abroad.

Her advice for those considering applying overseas is clear and direct. *"Take a position abroad for all the right reasons,"* she says. *"Be sure the timing and position is right and consider that your opportunities may change if you want to return back 'home.' Don't move abroad because it is where your boyfriend or girlfriend received a new job—lead, do not follow."*

Some US academics worry that an overseas move could take them permanently off the tenure track. Dr. Striano says it can actually be a smart tactical move. *"Overseas experience did not help per se, what helped was the resources and infrastructure afforded by the amazing institutes I worked at abroad,"* she says. *"As a result, my research group was extremely well published, well-funded, and had a strong international network."* If the choice is between a tenure-track post at a lower-rung US university and working abroad at a top university that does world-class research, her recommendation is to take the latter.

"The further you are from a supportive environment for research and scholarship, the harder it will be to do your research and obtain a position. It might be better to remain a visiting scholar at a prestigious institute for a few years rather than take a tenure or tenure-track position at a mediocre university. Once you are part of mediocrity it may become difficult to escape."

Dr. Striano urges academics to consult with others who have worked in the country or countries they are considering. Also, she adds, it's a good idea to have a local employment attorney check out your contract before you sign.

St Thomas Church, Leipzig

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Dr. Matthew Nelson

“ In the UK one feels closer to the rest of the world—not only closer to Europe but (particularly in London) closer to Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as well. ”

Central London

Dr. Matthew Nelson is a Reader in Politics at SOAS, University of London. His research focuses on the comparative and international politics of South Asia, with a special emphasis on comparative political thought, the politics of Islamic institutions, and democracy. Before coming to SOAS, Dr. Nelson taught at UC Santa Cruz, Bates College, and Yale University.

If your subject is international politics, it just makes sense to go after as much international experience as you can get. For Dr. Matthew Nelson, his work has brought him to SOAS in London, and he feels like it's exactly the right place to be.

"In the UK one feels closer to the rest of the world—not only closer to Europe but (particularly in London) closer to Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as well," he says. *"This is increasingly important in a globalised higher-education context. There is also a much better sense of the relationship between universities and the public at large [here] (including public policy)."*

That's not to say that life at a UK university is perfect. Dr. Nelson notes that UK higher education is quite bureaucratic, with managers making decisions that in the US might be left to academics. *"Resources devoted to administrative support are dwindling, as in the US; however in the UK administrative support tends to be considerably less effective than in the US,"* he says. *"In the UK one often has a sense that academic staff exist to support the requirements of university administrators rather than the other way around. Dealing with this is very difficult; several universities are developing campaigns for root-and-branch 'governance' reform to change existing patterns of authority and decision-making within the university."*

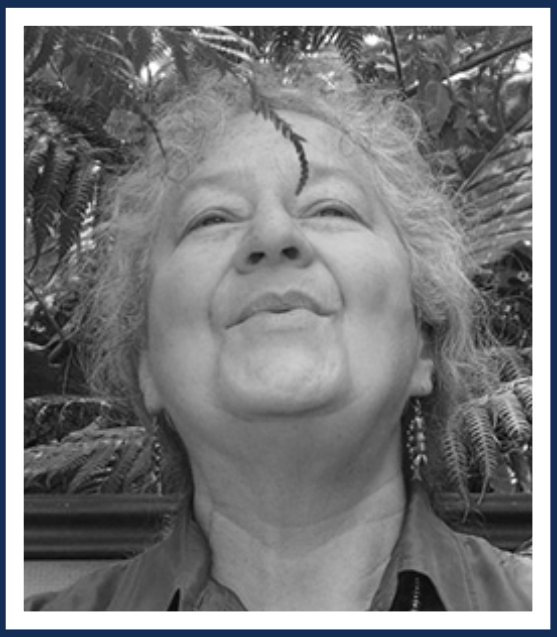
In the meantime, academics get on with what they are there for—teaching students. UK students are not radically different from their American counterparts, he notes, but the three-year undergraduate degree system leaves them very little time for small-scale seminars or other more creative academic discussions and projects. At SOAS, he says, there is a strong focus on end-of-year exams rather than multiple formative assessments that are used in many US universities. This pattern is typical of European universities in general although in some Humanities subjects the end-of-term goal will be an essay or practical project rather than an exam.

The application process also held some surprises, Dr. Nelson says:

"In the US academic job candidates often spend at least one to two days meeting with the department and students to ascertain whether the 'fit' is right (academically and in terms of collegiality), but in the UK it is unfortunate that this consideration of collegiality is not stressed. I was also surprised by the brief presentation/Q&A format; in the US the job talk is a far more elaborate form of engagement." Letters of reference also tend to hold less importance than how the academic presents in the brief interview," he adds.

Presidential Palace in Delhi

Dr. Darien Simon



" In both the UK and Australia the attitude toward employees, especially benefits (holiday leave) and work-life balance, is far superior to that in the US. "

Sydney skyline

Dr. Darien Simon was until recently a Postdoctoral Research Associate with the International Energy Policy Institute, University College of London (Australia). Her research is focused on the trans-disciplinary fields of community engagement and sustainability with a primary emphasis on energy and resources issues. She has particular expertise in systems thinking in sustainability and community engagement, reuse of contaminated lands, sustainable living and behaviour change and collaborative processes for climate change adaptation. Dr. Simon has a PhD in Urban Planning and Public Policy, an MSc in Educational Psychology and Counselling and a BSc in Marine Biology.

Wouldn't you love to have the problem that Dr. Darien Simon faced when working abroad: how to use up all those unexpected days of paid leave? *"In both the UK and Australia the attitude toward employees, especially benefits (holiday leave) and work-life balance, is far superior to that in the US,"* she says. *"Being accustomed to the very small amount of leave available in the US, it was difficult to use my UK and Australian leave until warned I would lose it when the next leave year began with not all leave rolling over."*

Of course, it's what happens while you're working that really makes a difference in job satisfaction. For Dr. Simon, looking abroad opened up options in her field of climate change adaptation and sustainability that simply weren't on offer at home. She was also able to move from a part-time post as a lecturer in sustainability to a postdoctoral post with a British university in Australia, despite the amount of time that had lapsed since completing her degree. In the US, she said, there tend to be rigid rules about postdocs, with posts strictly reserved for recent graduates. Overseas, however, universities appear to be more interested in the skills and background that you bring to an academic post—in Dr. Simon's case, that included extensive work in consultancy and for the US Cooperative Extension, a university-affiliated scholar-community liaison organization.

"My first UK job was with a research council as a project manager," she said (research councils are funding organizations for academic research.) *"I think my time as a consultant was more important for that position than academic experience. For my first higher education position in the UK, my qualifications matched the requirements very closely and I delivered an innovative presentation as part of my interview, introducing a perspective that seemed new to the search committee."* That approach worked, and she landed the job.

Dr. Simon can pass on some important tips to new applicants. First, find out how your particular degree is viewed overseas, and make sure you are applying for the right jobs. Second, be sure to join relevant professional organizations—this is not only a marker of involvement and prestige in your field, it can give you some opportunities for international networking and relevant training.

Teaching abroad has been both challenging and rewarding, Dr. Simon says. *"It sometimes appears that UK and Australian education is more rigorous, which may be true because of the different approach – small group tutorials rather than larger seminars in addition to lectures, for example,"* she says. *"Expectations are also higher for student research,"* she added, including at undergraduate level. On the other hand, academics who are used to designing their own courses may be in for a shock. In both the British and the Australian higher education systems, learning objectives, assessment methods and course structures are set in collaboration with colleagues. The input of external examiners is also an unfamiliar experience (although in reality, the system is usually collegial, not confrontational). *"For anyone seeking overseas employment, I would strongly advise asking questions about the system employed at the university you are considering to ensure your expectations are realistic,"* she says. Also, overseas universities often expect a formal teaching credential in addition to the PhD. While many will understand that US PhDs typically include a great deal of supervised teaching experience, this requirement can form a barrier that will need to be addressed.

"I think the experience of working overseas is to be recommended so long as anyone taking up the opportunity is willing and able to adapt to new situations and possibly abandon preconceived notions of what is the "right way" to provide higher education," says Dr. Simon.

"It is also important to consider whether you would be comfortable in the culture and society of the country where you are seeking employment. Especially if you accept a permanent position, would you be willing to take up residence or even citizenship in the new country? If at all possible, I would strongly recommend spending some time visiting a prospective country just to be sure it can accommodate your needs and you can adjust to the expectations there. Alternatively, spend some time studying the culture and society. It won't eliminate issues but should help minimise them."

If her experience is anything to go by, looking for work overseas is a great idea for academics who find their field marginalised or underfunded closer to home.

Dr. Rebecca Gould

" Teaching abroad can bring about a new relationship between your research and teaching, as it did for me. "

Singapore

Dr. Rebecca Gould is a Reader in Translation Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Bristol; previously, she taught at New York University, Columbia University, and Yale-NUS College in Singapore. She has a PhD from Columbia University, and specialises in the literatures of the Persian and Islamic world and in Translation Studies.

"Working abroad makes sense in terms of my scholarly trajectory and research interests, and I could never pursue my research adequately from within an exclusively US environment," says Dr. Rebecca Gould. *"My interests lie in world literature and knowledge of languages other than English. Globalizing the curriculum is a major aspect of my scholarly agenda, and this fits well with non-US positions."*

"Make sure you're ready to take the plunge," she advises potential applicants. *"Try to look for positions that closely dovetail with your research and which are based in places you would genuinely like to learn more about. And be ready to negotiate the terms of your employment before you start. It is reasonable to try to negotiate favourable terms (higher salary, more funding for travel and research) if you choose to relocate far from your home country."* This is especially true for posts that will take you away from established collaborations, meetings and conferences in your field.

"While working in Singapore, it was often difficult to stay active within my scholarly networks in the US and Europe. The difficulties of moving back and forth between the US and Asia were a major inconvenience (personally and professionally)," she adds. *"I think it is important to negotiate intensively prior to accepting a position in an inconvenient location for research funds that will cover the additional costs and also for library access (if needed) at a US university,"* she said. *"You should expect (and request) better compensation and research support than at a comparable US university, given the difficulties of travel."*

The joys of working in Singapore and now in the UK have included *"working with stellar students who bring knowledge to the classroom that few US students have, learning about different cultures and languages, new possibilities for collaborative teaching, travelling to places I never otherwise would have had the chance to see, and being able to show how my work is global not only in terms of the texts that I read and write about but also in terms of where I live and teach,"* she says.

At Yale-NUS, Dr. Gould was able to create a new curriculum from scratch, *"in collaboration with colleagues specializing in a vast array of literatures, cultures, and disciplinary methodologies," she notes. "Teaching abroad can bring about a new relationship between your research and teaching, as it did for me."*

Having the chance to introduce a liberal arts approach was especially gratifying, she adds:

"The students I taught in Singapore were very receptive to liberal arts style seminars and discussions, but few had experienced such pedagogical methods first hand. In general, I have found non-US students everywhere to be politer, more disciplined, and a greater pleasure to work with than US undergraduates," adds Dr. Gould. *"For graduate students, there is a greater degree of parity among different countries. But at the undergraduate level, the higher quality of students outside the US (both in Singapore and the UK) is a major argument in favour of working at non-US universities."*

Clifton Suspension Bridge

Dr. Thomas Carter

"That outsider status sometimes means you end up seeing things that others just take for granted and don't realize how odd it might be."


Queen's University of Belfast

Dr. Thomas Carter is Principal Lecturer in the School of Sport and Service Management. He earned his PhD in Anthropology from the University of New Mexico in 2000, and was a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of Anthropological Studies at the Queen's University of Belfast. As a researcher, he has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the US, Ecuador, Wales, Northern Ireland and Cuba, with a particular interest in sport-related labour migration.

Like many American academics abroad, anthropologist Dr. Thomas Carter went overseas for work early in his career, with the idea of soon returning home. *"That return looks less and less likely,"* he now says.

"My speciality in sport made me practically unique within my discipline when I got my postdoctoral fellowship" [in Belfast], he says. *"The fellowship was focused on sport and its effects on the local economy and culture so I fit the parameters perfectly. My immediate availability also helped, probably. It was a temporary contract and I was willing to come over for that brief period (18 months)."*

Dr. Carter has experienced the concerns about work visas that can put some academics off. When his fellowship was renewed, it wasn't for long enough to allow him to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain, the UK category that allows overseas hires to work and live in the UK without worry over their legal status and which can lead to citizenship. For that, he says,

"I had to obtain a different job: and even then, there were hiccups. It has become much more difficult to obtain a visa and to obtain indefinite leave to remain for those thinking about coming to the UK," he adds.

"Without institutional support, it is incredibly difficult to deal with the immigration procedures to obtain a work visa or to obtain indefinite leave to remain. The university should be able to assist, but also recognize that it costs the institution a fee to apply on your behalf. [It's] not much proportionally, but still enough that it does occasionally make some administrators think twice about hiring someone from overseas."

The interview process threw up some surprises as well, he says:

"It was very different than the US. I certainly did not expect to meet my competition for a job and certainly did not expect to be in a room with them for most of the day while each of us was one by one taken out for interviews and presentations. Stuck in a room with nothing else to do made it very awkward. I remember one instance where a competitor/colleague and I both ended up at a third job interview after having met at two previous university interviews in the previous months. The woman who was charged with looking after us was rather surprised when we greeted each other by name and immediately started commiserating before she could conduct any formal introduction. There was no meeting graduate students, other members of staff or much of the more "social" vetting that is done at American universities during the interview process."

The speed with which staffing decisions were made was also astounding. *"Several times, someone from the interview panel telephoned me as I was travelling home that evening or the next day at the latest,"* he says. *"I had been interviewed that day and a decision was already finalised. This was true both when I was successful and obtained the post, and when I was unsuccessful."*

Dr. Carter says he has encountered few barriers, and that the best way to deal with issues is:

"To keep asking questions both formally and informally. Friends have been vital to helping figure out what is unique to your situation as a foreign academic and what is actually simply something that all of you have to deal with to some degree," he notes. *"That outsider status sometimes means you end up seeing things that others just take for granted and don't realize how odd it might be."*

"One of the major items for consideration is the difference in expectations of those working in higher education," he adds. *"While the US expects scholars to publish, particularly to earn tenure, the whole 'publish or perish' mantra in the UK is even more driven and constant. An average of one article a year is not sufficient, given the REF. That pressure never goes away either; it does not matter if you are a full professor or a research-active Lecturer (which you will have to be to be able to get a work visa). To reach the aspired minimum standard of 'internationally excellent' necessitates a constant drive of writing manuscripts and grants and conducting fieldwork."*

For this reason, he urges applicants to ask potential employers about institutional support mechanisms.

"Some universities are fabulous, with dedicated departments and staff to help with the first couple of years and deal with everything from banking to housing, others…just expect you to deal with all the additional challenges that citizens would not."

Dr. Will Bennis

" The chance to live and work abroad is something that everyone should experience if possible at some point in their lives. "

Prague

Dr. Will Bennis is a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of New York in Prague. He earned his Masters from the University of Southern California and his doctorate from the University of Chicago, and has done postdoctoral work at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin and Northwestern University in the US. He is a cultural psychologist and cognitive anthropologist whose research interests include cultural and environmental factors that influence decision-making.

Following a spouse is a common reason that American academics end up overseas. Dr. Bennis' wife is Czech, so he made the decision to move and then began to seek an appropriate post.

He picked the right time—several Czech universities have entered the market for international students in recent years, launching programmes that are taught entirely in English. As a lecturer in psychology, Dr. Bennis found it less difficult than you might expect to land a post. *"My market was narrow,"* he says. *"I just approached universities in Prague with English language programs and asked about opportunities for teaching psychology. For that particular market, a Ph.D. from a good university and some publications will go a long way."* Teaching experience gave him an extra edge, he adds.

However, working in Eastern Europe is not a ticket to riches. Pay is generally low, despite the fact that universities are competing for a small pool of native English speakers to teach these new programmes. Dr. Bennis has dealt with the situation by being entrepreneurial, launching one of Prague's first co-working facilities for freelancers and other professionals as a side-line to lecturing. One of the most interesting parts of the job has been encountering a very diverse student body.

"Learning about the university student generation as it varies across different cultural groups has been a pleasure," he says. *"About a third of my students have been Czech, a third from former East Bloc countries, and a third American exchange students, with a small number of others. It's a very nice way to learn and stay connected with education around the world."* Cheating has occasionally been an issue, he says:

"I've had to deal with some blatant cases where the students themselves didn't think they were doing anything wrong"—but Czech universities are aware of the problem and are trying to be proactive in stemming it.

The *"semester abroad"* crowd from the US bring with them challenges that a lecturer must consider when preparing material, he notes: *"I think part of the solution is just to accept that a big part of the reason they're here is to experience the local culture and travel, [so you should] change the content of the courses a bit to keep things interesting and educational while also being less demanding."*

"Working in an English-language programme is very different from working at a traditional Czech university," he adds. His Czech students speak English, come from families who are willing to pay tuition, and can enter with just a high school diploma. *"This is quite different from the Czech public universities here, where classes are taught in Czech, the education is basically free, and admission standards are extremely tough,"* Dr. Bennis says. That said, English-language programmes in the Czech Republic are not carbon copies of American universities:

"US universities are much more about the overall college experience, and students there are for more likely to develop a sense of identity connected to their universities. Czechs are not. Not at all. There are no fraternities and sororities. There are no college sports teams. There are no mugs and sweatshirts emblazoned with the university name and logo. There are no schools out in small rural areas where the students all go and live there and sort of have four years of life protected from the outside world. There are no alumni here who donate huge sums of money to their alma mater. School is something you do here, usually while you're also working full time and at least going home every weekend, not that much different from high school except for the level of education."

Dr. Bennis said that getting permission to work and live in the Czech Republic was no problem, but he's in a special situation as the partner of an EU citizen. *"Generally if you're a member of the Schengen zone or have a family member who is one, it is much easier to move and work here,"* he says. *"If you're not, the process is more complicated, but usually the university will have someone who can help you with that process."*

He warns potential applicants to be prepared for university programmes that may be under-resourced by US standards, and for lower pay. However, he adds,

"the chance to live and work abroad is something that everyone should experience if possible at some point in their lives. Like other things that broaden your perspective and help you enrich your sample of the world, it's part of the academic/scientific ideal (at least in the social sciences) of getting a truer picture of the social/cultural world we live in."

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Dr. Tabitha Kenlon

"I do believe that I have been able to get more experience teaching literature than I would have if I had stayed in the US and been an adjunct."


Dubai

Dr. Tabitha Kenlon is Assistant Professor of English at American University in Dubai. She completed her PhD in English at Northeastern University, following an MA in Text and Performance at King's College, London. Her research interests are focused on eighteenth-century English novels, theatre, and conduct manuals, with particular emphasis on the contributions and concerns of women.

Dr. Tabitha Kenlon says she was a traveller from Day One, so seeking work overseas was part of a lifelong pattern. *"I was born in Spain to American parents, and the longest I've lived in one place was six years, while doing the PhD,"* she says. *"I did my MA in London and loved it, so I was hoping to go back to England or elsewhere in Europe. Frankly, by the time I applied to the position I hold now at the American University in Dubai, I really just wanted a job in general. I didn't have a desire to live in Dubai, but moving overseas didn't frighten me, so when I was offered the job, I took it."*

As she says, the job market for lecturers in eighteenth-century English literature is not exactly booming, especially for freshly minted postgrads. However, she thinks the combination of her experience of teaching composition at Northeastern University during her postgraduate studies and her literature specialisation helped her to get the post, her first as a lecturer, as both English composition and English literature are required courses at American University in Dubai (AUD).

Getting to know a new group of students has been interesting, and requires being ready to adjust to high levels of variability:

"Perhaps the most noticeable difference is punctuality. I regularly have students come to class ten, fifteen, even thirty-five minutes late, which I never encountered in the US.

The level of preparation also seems to vary much more here—some students attended IB schools or academies with rigorous curricula, while other students are taking formal English classes for the first time. I have students who learned English haphazardly and are highly functional in conversation, but have low levels of reading comprehension and writing ability. Given the increasingly diverse population in the US, I'm sure these things are true of many students at US universities as well, but I am frequently surprised at the disparities in preparation and experience. At Northeastern, I could generally count on students being familiar with the concept of a thesis statement, and in all likelihood, my students had read more than one novel in its entirety—I have students here who have never read a book."

However, as many job-seekers have found, opportunities abound in areas like the Middle East and Central Asia, where the desire for higher education has led to huge expansion in the sector. At the same time, job-seekers may notice worrying signs in other areas of overseas hires becoming less welcome than they once were. *"I think what I found most discouraging was that some ads in England just stated outright that they were unwilling to provide visa sponsorship,' says Dr. Kenlon. "On one hand, it was good to know up front that I shouldn't waste my time, but it was also a little depressing to know that viable candidates might not even get a chance. This isn't the fault of the university: I know the visa process can be costly and time-consuming, but it was disappointing nonetheless."*

Working at AUD has turned out to be a gateway to many new experiences, she adds:

"I've travelled to places I might not have gone to if I had stayed in the US, such as Oman and Nepal, in addition to other emirates that I hadn't even heard of before. I've learned about various cultures from my students, who are quite an international group. One young woman wrote a heartbreakingly beautiful essay comparing and contrasting Damascus before the war and after it started. I get stories and perspectives here that I probably would not encountered elsewhere."

Of course, there is occasionally culture shock to cope with.

"Although Dubai is a fairly open society and I am able to wear my usual Western clothes and I don't have to cover my hair, there are some subtle attitudes toward women that I generally just try to ignore," Dr. Kenlon notes.

Before you make the move, she says you should research as comprehensively as possible. *"I found blogs about living in Dubai not terribly helpful—opinions veered wildly from 'it's the best place ever!' to 'it's the worst place ever!"* she says. *"The truth, of course, is somewhere in between."* Connecting with someone who could discuss their personal experience frankly turned out to be the best solution: *"It was important to me to know how women were treated and what I would be expected to wear,"* she says. *"I got a very helpful email from a Northeastern alum who had worked at AUD; he provided a measured description of what to expect that turned out to be very accurate."*

Dr. Kenlon was lucky in that AUD (in common with many universities in the region) provided her housing as part of the whole compensation package, and she moved alone. *"I would suggest finding out what your options are for housing, in case you don't like what your employer provides,"* she says. *"Just expect the whole process to be more expensive than you think it will be"*—probably good advice for anyone thinking of moving overseas for work, as there are almost always a few unforeseen costs.

Dr. Kenlon says she feels it nonetheless been a wise career move. *"I do believe that I have been able to get more experience teaching literature than I would have if I had stayed in the US and been an adjunct," she says. "I hope also that my experience teaching diverse students will be appealing to other universities with international populations."* She intends to continue her career overseas—although in keeping with her life so far, probably not in one place for too long.

Dr. Alexander Chirila

"Students are typically polite, civil, and well-mannered, to them, a teacher is not a customer service agent."

Thailand

Dr. Alexander Chirila currently teaches English and Literature in the Global Citizenship programme at Webster University in Thailand; previously he was a lecturer at the American University of Nigeria. He completed a PhD in Writing and Criticism at the State University of New York at Albany. He is the founder of the Centre for Comparative Spiritual Studies, also an author whose interests include teaching, travelling and mysticism.

Dr. Alexander Chirila teaches at Webster University in Thailand, a university that currently serves students from 60 different nationalities. Previously, he was a lecturer in Nigeria. Working abroad offers him the chance to get closer to his research subject, indigenous and contemporary spiritual traditions. But it's also a fantastic way to immerse yourself in another culture, he says:

"I learned not too long ago that in order to know a place, you have to live there. Breathe its air, walk its earth, break bread with its people. I've since discovered that there is one thing better, at least for me: teaching in a place. Students bring their worlds and lives into the classroom. You have to know how to draw these stories out and really listen to them, how to weave your students' experiences into the very substance of the ongoing conversation that you're having with them."

He cites *"altruism, wanderlust, a sense of adventure and social justice, and anthropological curiosity"* as factors that lecturers working overseas tend to have, but notes that they also need to have *"energy, patience, and understanding"*—especially when they're ramping up a new course on short order and missing friends and family far away. One of the greatest pleasures of working in the southern hemisphere has been encountering students who are massively motivated.

"They are hungrier for it; some of them fought their way tooth and nail through corruption and incompetence, impoverished facilities and dusty miles of trekking to be in that classroom," he says. *"For them, education is a hard-won privilege."*

Of course, he also teaches students whose struggles are different. *"For those students who come from more fortunate backgrounds, they are under immense pressures to succeed,"* he says. *"Some come from backgrounds where conformity and silence are predominant values in the classroom; they are the most unlike American students, for whom non-conformity and individuality are still recognized as virtues rather than vices. It is satisfying to see them adapt to a different model—to see them use their voices and take an active role in their education."*

This experience has helped him gain a greater appreciation for the development of students from impoverished communities in the US, he adds, who have often shared the same kinds of stultifying educational experiences before entering university.

The attitude towards lecturers has also been a refreshing change: *"Students coming from those environments are typically polite, civil, and well-mannered,"* he says. *"To them, a teacher is not a customer service agent, there to make sure that a student's educational experience is satisfactory (as is getting to be the case in many stateside institutions.) They expect to be challenged, and they expect to learn more about the world they live in, even those parts that may be uncomfortable or disquieting."*

As someone who claims to have applied for posts on every continent except Antarctica, Dr. Chirila's advice to job-seekers is simple:

do your research. Overseas universities can have very different application procedures than those you are used to in the US, for example. You should also find out as much as you can about the university's history and focus as you can, and learn more than a Wikipedia entry's worth about the country where it is located, especially if you have been offered an interview. He also cautioned that salaries overseas can vary wildly, so check to make sure the pay will provide an adequate standard of living.

Five years into his overseas adventure, Dr. Chirila remains positive about the prospects. *"If you enjoy travelling, teaching, and cultural immersion, do it,"* he says:

"Freedom is possibility, and while life can often work to limit both, there are roads that crisscross the entire world. The international academic road is one of these, and possibilities abound on it, for those who know how to take advantage of them."


Thailand beach

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Dr. Greg Votolato

“I enjoyed a remarkably barrier-free career trajectory.”

Buckinghamshire

Dr. Greg Votolato studied Art History at Boston University, majored in Fine Art and Architecture at Rhode Island School of Design, completed an MFA at Pratt Institute, and then a PhD in Design History at Teesside University in the UK. Formerly Professor of Design at Buckinghamshire New University, he is now a lecturer in the Victoria & Albert Museum's Learning Department and a contributor to the Masters programme in the History of Design at Kellogg College, Oxford.

If you're wondering what it's like to start overseas and stay forever, Dr. Greg Votolato's experience is indicative—though even he admits that he had a number of lucky breaks that may make his career atypical. He moved into lecturing as a side-line to another post that had brought him to the UK, with evening and weekend teaching eventually leading to working as a lecturer with a British art school. *"Being an American seemed a genuine advantage at the time, at least among those individuals I approached for work," he says. "I guess we were in fashion."*

"The British art college system valued individuals with both academic and studio qualifications to teach in what was then called Complementary Studies. I had both," he says. What he didn't have was a PhD: at that time, he notes, art schools did not require a PhD of lecturers. In fact, although it is increasingly the norm to have a PhD, there are still many lecturers in the UK system—especially in fields where, as in art, practical experience in the field is required to deliver industry- or discipline-relevant teaching—who have not completed one. Dr. Votolato had done some teaching while on his MFA course, but his experience of delivering evening and weekend courses for adults was one of the factors that made him an attractive proposition as a starting lecturer.

And indeed, he has had a rather charmed life in the higher education sector, with opportunities along the way that included two fellowships in Australia and a high degree of personal freedom in post.

"I enjoyed a remarkably barrier-free career trajectory," affirms Dr. Votolato:

"As my first boss told me, everyone finds "his" level. I found mine as a Head of Department in a school where I was allowed a high degree of influence or control over course development, staffing, curriculum design and research. Because of the support I enjoyed from the college directorate and the Dean above me, I had the opportunity to refresh my role several times over the many years I worked for that institution. I was granted three lengthy sabbaticals, which kept me fresh and fostered new directions in my professional development."

He began his academic career at a time that older academics often describe as something of a *"golden age,"* an era in which UK higher education was still tuition-free and in the process of opening up to students from outside the traditional elites. *"State support for art and design education in this country created an environment in which students of all backgrounds could learn and succeed,"* Dr. Votolato says. *"The post-war English art college model, based on a Bauhaus-type Foundation Course followed by three years of undergraduate study (NDD, Dip AD, BAHons), was a marvellous system enabling aspiring artists and designers from all levels of society to flourish."*

The academic world is always changing, of course, and new entrants may have a very different experience. As Dr. Votolato notes, he has seen trends emerging in the students he teaches over the years.

"The contrast between US and British students was most notable in my early career, when the British were still grant-supported," he says. *"There were many more rough diamonds among them, who were eager to learn and to get on, as opposed to the privileged, finishing-school culture of the American institutions where I had studied. With the privatization of HE in the UK, the latter has now become the norm in Britain too."*

Victoria and Albert Museum

Additional information

Taking your career overseas requires much more planning than applying for jobs in your country of origin. Detailed, comprehensive planning is a must—especially if you have a partner and/or children.

Preliminary planning

It's a good idea to narrow down your search to just a handful of countries. Consider the following questions in particular:

- What countries have resources, institutions, or networks of colleagues that would be especially beneficial for my research?
- Where is my academic specialty in demand, either because it is new, or because it has recently become very popular among students?
- What countries use the languages I speak in higher education?
- Am I eligible to receive a permit to work in the country?

Top tip

If there is any one thing that can broaden your chance of finding work overseas, it is achieving proficiency in one or more languages other than English. As several academics interviewed for this e-book note, many universities are in the process of "internationalising" their degrees, which often means offering them in English. However, the day-to-day work of an academic will not always be in English, and linguistic barriers can hurt you at the application phase or, having obtained a post, in your relationships with peers.

Even if speaking the local language isn't mentioned in post criteria, stating that you are currently taking a course and enthusiastic about learning to speak it will be attractive to those comparing candidates.

The legal side—finding out about required visas, work permits, regulations regarding partners and children accompanying an overseas worker—should be part of your preliminary investigation, not left for last. There can be different levels of permission based on the work sector or even specific academic field, and on whether the post is temporary or permanent. Your age, marital status, and the salary on offer can also make a difference. Some countries have special schemes for "high value" overseas hires, and academics often—though not always—may be on the list of occupations covered by these schemes.

Watch out for income restrictions as well. Some governments have started to limit work or residence permits to individuals earning over a certain salary: this now applies in the UK, for example. Although sometimes academic posts are exempt, such restrictions may pose a serious problem for academics moving into early-career posts (overseas applicants are already barred from taking part-time posts in the UK.) You may also need to show proof of having a certain amount of savings for a specific period of time before entering the country.

Top tip

Be sure to check carefully the immigration laws and legal practices of the country you are thinking of applying to, taking into account whether your current lifestyle or personal associations could be considered illegal, dangerous or detrimental to career progress in that particular country. If you or a family member travelling with you are disabled, be sure to fully check for any disability immigration restrictions.

If you have a partner, you'll need to know whether they are allowed to come with you—for married, heterosexual couples this is usually the case, but unmarried partners and gay or lesbian couples (married or otherwise) can face barriers. You'll want to also know whether your partner is allowed to work. If you have children, find out whether they will be able to attend state schools, or whether you need to factor private education into your budget. You may need to submit your US qualifications for vetting by an overseas body, which will then issue a certificate stating what qualification it is equivalent to in that country. You may also need to have certain documents, such as your birth certificate, specially validated for use in the immigration process.

These processes can take quite a bit of time, and also have costs attached. If you get them out of the way early, it will be easier to be ready to move at short notice should you receive a job offer.

Once you accept an offer, always ask the hiring university to check that you meet all requirements before you give notice at your current job or make arrangements for your move. The employer should always be expected to assist you through the processes for visas and work permits—their cooperation is crucial for success.

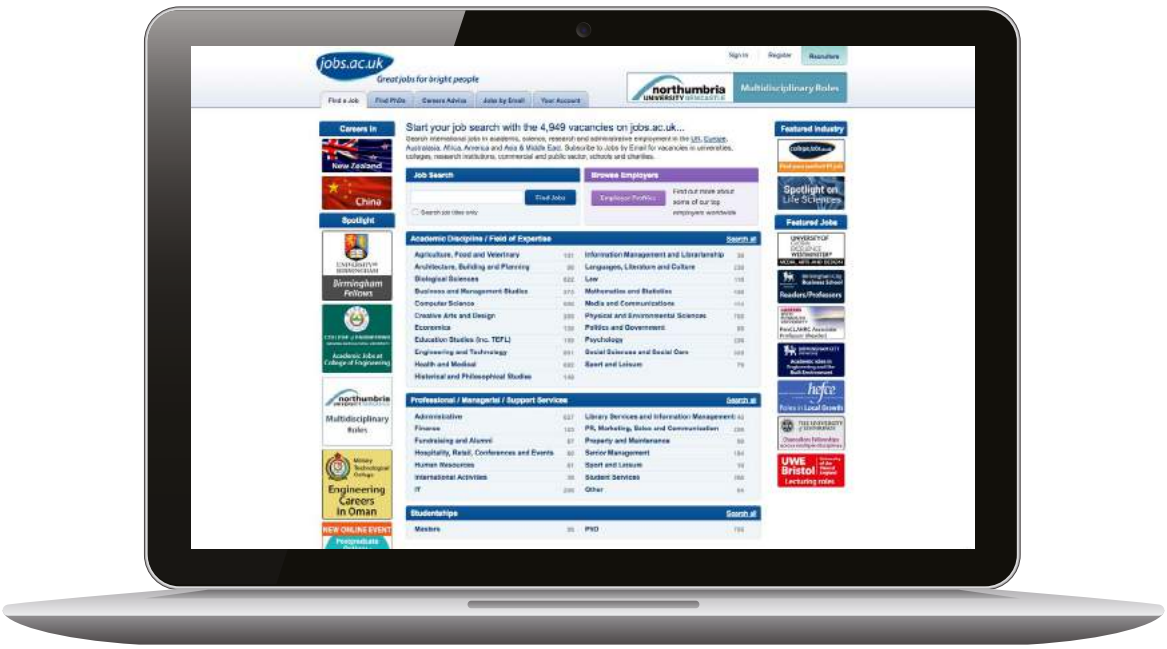
Start your planning task with official sources: the embassies of your target countries (a personal visit can be quite helpful if one is located near you; otherwise make contact online), the closest US Embassy or consulate, the US State Department's information about living and working overseas as a US citizen (http://www.state.gov), and information provided directly by the universities you want to apply to. There may also be a national subject association active within the country; if so, reading through its website can often help you quickly see which universities are most research-active and who the prominent scholars are—all helpful for making wise choices.

A few more areas you may need to look into include:

- Tax regulations—don't forget, all Americans living and working overseas (including dual citizens) must file with the IRS as well as in the country where they work…
- Health care / health insurance
- Quality of local public transport options
- Driving (including Driving license rules)
- Professional licensing portability for those working in fields such as engineering, architecture and medicine
- Opportunities to pursue your hobbies and sports

Finding a post

Of course, we want you to use jobs.ac.uk as a key part of your work search! Our site offers listings for academic posts not just in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), but further afield as well. There may also be relevant nation-specific or sector-specific job boards to check. You can often set up electronic job alerts directly with universities of interest via their websites. Another important step before applying is to ensure that your academic CV and cover letter are in the format expected, and have been carefully tailored to match each opportunity. If you have managed to cultivate contact with a local colleague, it can't hurt to ask if they will have a look and give you some advice.



As in the US, academic posts abroad sometimes attract hundreds of applicants. Your international experience and specific teaching and research expertise may give you a head start, but always read job descriptions carefully and be responsive. As several of our interviewees noted, overseas institutions may have different criteria or emphases than you are used to (and if you're lucky, these can work in your favour!) If you are offered an interview, it is always best if you can come in person. You may need a special kind of visa to do this, rather than a tourist visa. Sometimes, your travel costs may be covered, so be sure to ask! Also ask what the interview process will entail, and what documents you will need to bring with you on the day. For example, overseas applicants in the UK are expected to have their original degree certificates and passport with them, as these are needed by the university to vet your eligibility to work in the UK.

Prepare for the interview with a list of your skills, aptitudes and research interests, crafted to fit the job description. If you can find out who will be on the interview panel, try to take their research interests in mind as you write this up. Also take the opportunity to focus additional research on the programme and university that has asked to know more about you. Asking intelligent questions that show the depth of your knowledge will definitely set you in good stead with the panel.

Some institutions do also offer—or insist on, in these days of budget constraints—interviews conducted via Skype or similar teleconferencing services. Speaking to an interview panel from a big screen on the wall can introduce a few wrinkles. It's harder to make a personal connection, and you may feel rather ill at ease. If you are asked to do a remote interview, think carefully about where you will be seated, the lighting, and the image quality. If your computer has a poor-quality camera, consider buying an inexpensive external camera; alternatively, there are facilities in most major cities that provide professional teleconferencing services. If you're using your own set-up, test everything in advance with a friend. Make sure you have electronic versions of all key documents handy in case they are requested, and print out a list of points you want to make during the interview, and your questions for the panel.

Before accepting an offer, be sure it's definitely the job that you want. It's one thing to take a post that isn't great just to pay the rent when you're in a familiar place, where the consequences of failure or making the wrong choice are much smaller. It's quite another to find yourself in a job you don't like in an unfamiliar country. Sometimes work permit restrictions can be a trap—if you leave a post, you must leave the country unless you have a new post already lined up. And of course, the costs of moving to and from a foreign country are not small. As one of our interviewees suggested, it can also be wise to run your contract by a local lawyer before signing. The closest US Embassy or Consulate, or an organization for English-speaking expats, may be able to provide a referral to someone with relevant qualifications.

Help when you arrive

Typically the university that hires you can help with all sorts of issues, such as advising you on finding housing near your work. Your first step upon arriving and meeting the administrative staff tasked with helping new hires should be to ask whether they can help you with any documents you may need to open a local bank account, something you'll probably need before you can tackle all the other tasks.

You may be able to find a room or flat to rent online in advance, although many universities will arrange temporary housing for staff coming from overseas. Make sure you are using a reliable site, and never send money by wire transfer. There are, unfortunately, many scammers operate on websites catering for expat renters—it's always best to go directly to the university's housing department or a reputable local rental agency rather than a potentially dubious website that does not vet the properties listed. Rental firms that target expats often charge far more than the usual going rate; however, in some countries (especially in the Middle East) you may need a specialist service due to restrictions on where foreigners can live.

Social media connections can often be surprisingly helpful. Someone you know may know someone in the city you are moving to—what better way to get started than with a conversation or early meeting with a local? So once you're sure about your move, put out a call to friends and connections via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Also, once you have given notice and can speak openly about your departure, ask current colleagues. They may well have connections that you would never find out about otherwise.

Finally, ask your current supervisor, line manager, or a senior academic who knows you well about formal letters of introduction, printed on University letterhead. In some countries, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, these are an expected part of the process of making connections with colleagues in a new department. Copies can be given to senior academics and prominent people working in your field in your new country, along with a request for an initial meeting. This gives you a chance to start building a strong local network from day one.

If you are travelling solo, watch out for the possibility of feeling quite lonely at first. The excitement of landing in a new city and starting a new job can wear off quicker than you might think when you find yourself coming home to a quiet flat every night. Enquire about academic networks to join within your first two weeks, and use administrative and academic team meetings as networking opportunities.

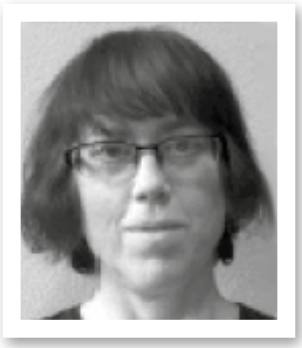
And don't forget to build in a social life. Your university may have organizations or activities for international students, and international staff often find that getting involved with these efforts is great fun and a good way to find a place quickly within the university community. Language schools can serve both the purpose of meeting interesting new people, and making sure you are able to settle into the local culture.

Finally, once you've gotten everything on track, start planning your next move, whether that's to a higher academic rung, another overseas post, or back to the US and the tenure track game. If the latter is your goal, there's no break just because you're temporarily working overseas. Ensure that you continue to get high-quality academic journal articles published, and document all research funding received in your new post. Retain documents showing which modules you created and/or taught, which courses you administrated, your annual evaluation results, and any additional information that could be used to support an application for a tenure-track post, such as records of service work overseas.

The overseas contacts that you make can give you an advantage when you return, if you turn them into collaborative papers or grant applications. Research grants in particular often call for diverse international applicant groups, and someone you previously worked with overseas is an obvious choice. Retaining relationships with US colleagues is also important, of course, to ensure you have allies in post when you're ready to return.

Finally, watch out for the two "expat traps"—never integrating with the local community and living entirely in an "expat bubble," or landing somewhere, not liking it all that much, but gradually sinking into a routine that eventually becomes impossible to extricate yourself from. Make a five-year plan based on your personal values and career aspirations, and it will help guide your decision making.

Author

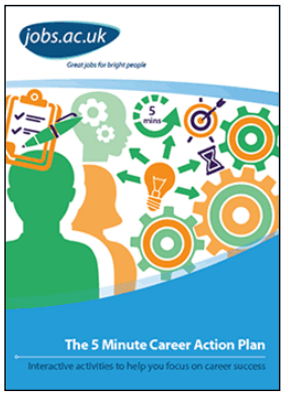


Dr. Mitzi Waltz has recently embarked on working as a freelance disability consultant, trainer and writer, based in Amsterdam. She was previously Senior Lecturer in Autism Studies at The Autism Centre, Sheffield Hallam University, following five years with the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER), University of Birmingham, and a long career as a journalist and journalism educator. She has contributed to many key pieces of autism research and resources, including the DCSF Inclusion Development Programmes on working with children and young people with autism. She has written ten books, the most recent of which is Autism: A Social and Medical History (2013, Palgrave Macmillan).

Resources

The Global Academic Careers Guide

Moving abroad: Relocating from the US to the UK



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