

Diplomatic Training Ground

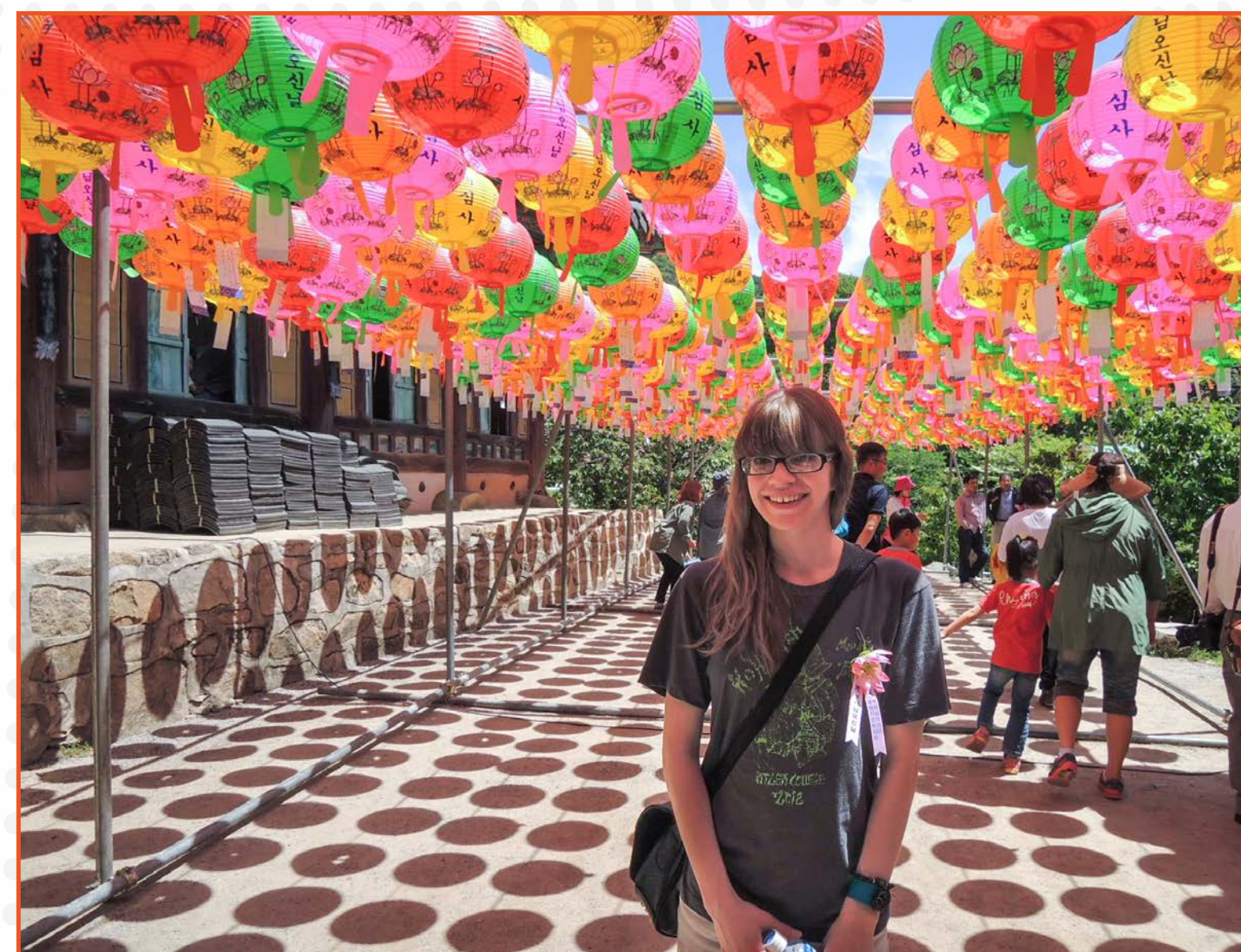
ECA affords U.S. students essential international perspective

By Rebecca Gailey and Anna Du

When Cody Klock stepped off the plane in South Korea in 2010 to begin the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) program, she had no idea she was starting a journey that would lead her into federal service. “It was the most challenging thing I had ever done, but probably the best,” said Klock. “Everything that has happened to me afterward has been because of the Critical Language Scholarship.” Eight years later, Klock is now a member of the Civil Service and a country officer for children’s issues in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, where she uses her language skills and cultural knowledge to help international parental child abduction cases involving South Korea and five other East Asian and Pacific countries. She is one of many American alumni of Department of State exchanges who are bringing the skills they acquired overseas back to the Department to help advance U.S. foreign policy.

Every year, more than 3,500 American students study overseas on two programs administered by the USA Study Abroad branch in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. CLS provides full scholarships to approximately 550 American undergraduate and graduate students each summer to attend intensive language institutes overseas in 14 foreign languages that are critical to U.S. national security. Klock leveraged the skills she gained during the program to, first, secure an internship on the Korea desk and, ultimately, convert into a full-time Civil Service role serving U.S. national interests.

The USA Study Abroad branch also administers the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, which targets students traditionally underrepresented in study abroad programs by offering scholarships for credit-bearing study or internships abroad to U.S. | *Cont.* | ▼



Cody Klock, a former critical language scholar, stands beneath colorful lanterns celebrating Buddha's birthday at Gaeshimsa Temple, near Seosan, South Korea, in 2010.

Photo courtesy of Cody Klock

undergraduate recipients of Pell grants, a federal grant to assist low-income students to finance their higher education. Every year, approximately 3,000 Gilman scholars travel to diverse countries around the world, gaining 21st-century workplace skills and sharing American culture overseas.

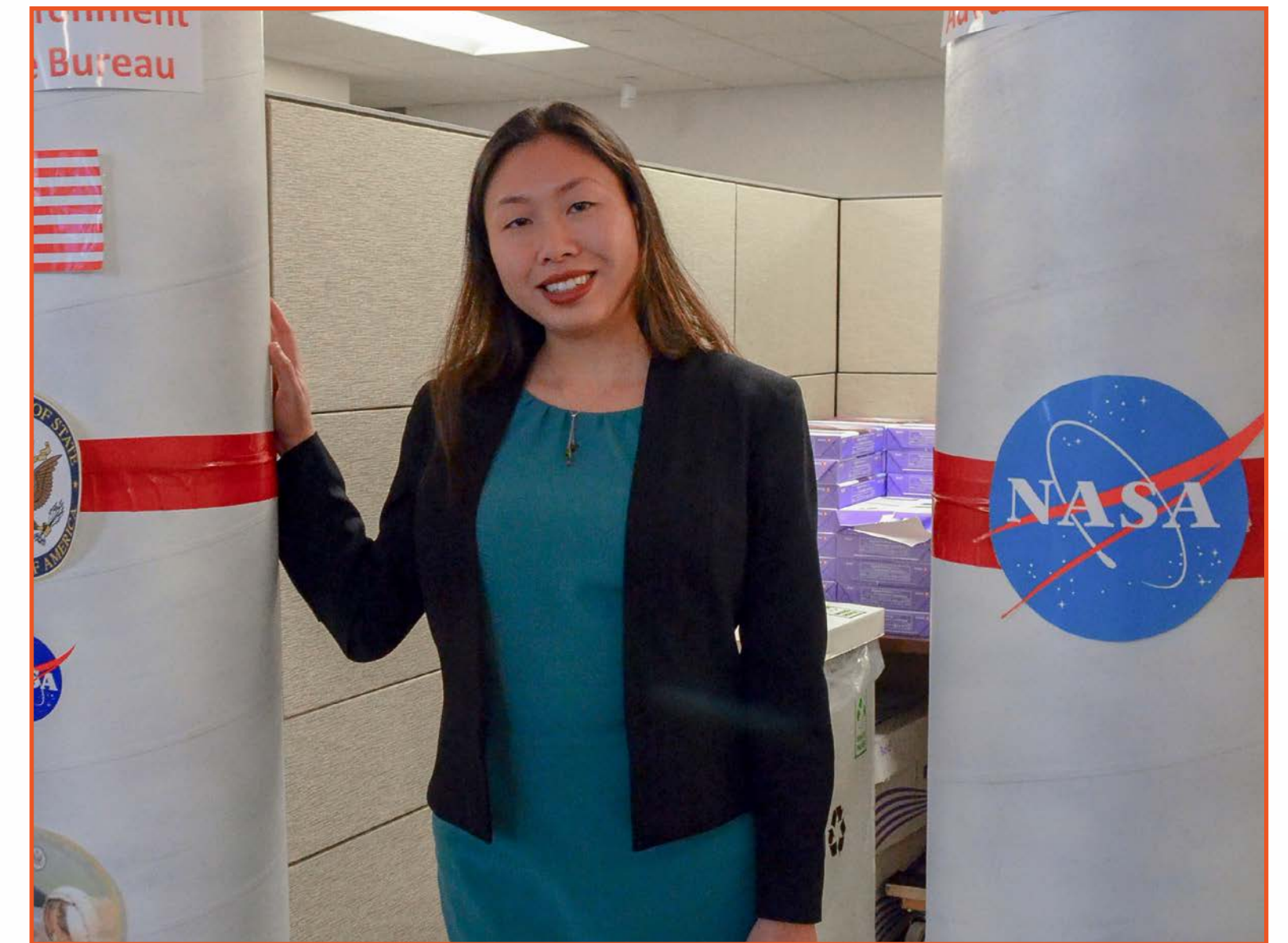
According to Stephanie Wan, a 2006 Gilman scholar in Beijing, study abroad programs like Gilman and CLS are essential because they give participants the international perspective they need to work effectively in today's multicultural world. "[An international perspective] is especially helpful in national security because you are able to understand the perspectives of various stakeholders and their needs," Wan said. "It's easier to form compromises and cooperate on opportunities when you understand what the other party values." Wan should know. After her time abroad, she began a career in space diplomacy as a contractor working with NASA and other federal agencies. She is currently assigned to the Department's Office of Space and Advanced Technology, where she works on Global Positioning System and Global Navigation Satellite System cooperation and fostering U.S. and Asia-Pacific cooperation in space.

Heidi Manley, the acting branch chief for USA Study Abroad and deputy director in the Office of Global Educational Programs, says her office's programs are helping to fill mission-critical skill gaps across the federal workforce.

"The Critical Language Scholarship and Gilman Scholarship programs help participants develop the language skills and cultural knowledge that employers at the Department of State and other federal agencies need," she said.

In fact, half of Gilman alumni and more than 60 percent of CLS alumni report using knowledge gained on program in their jobs. A recent survey showed that more than 20 percent of CLS alumni have careers in local, state or federal government, and about 25 percent of the combined July and September 2017 Foreign Service A-100 classes were alumni of Gilman, CLS or the U.S. Fulbright student program.

Joshua Trinidad, an alumnus of CLS and Gilman, recently entered the Foreign Service. He said that he learned to improvise and persevere when confronted with cultural and language obstacles. He struggled to communicate in French when he arrived in Paris as a 2011–12 Gilman scholar, so he learned to be flexible to overcome the language barrier and build relationships. As a Foreign Service officer, he will use the problem-solving and relationship-building skills he learned as a Gilman scholar at his first post, Ciudad Juarez. "Having personal contact with people from



Stephanie Wan contributes to space diplomacy as a contractor assigned to the Office of Space and Advanced Technology in the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. She studied in Beijing as a Gilman scholar in 2006. *Photo by Anna Du*



While serving as an intern at Embassy Tokyo in 2016, Joshua Trinidad is interviewed in Japanese on the streets of Tokyo for a game show. He studied in France as a Gilman scholar, and in Japan with CLS.

Photo courtesy of Joshua Trinidad

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other cultures is the best way to break down cultural barriers,” said Trinidad. “People who study abroad and the people they interact with develop personal connections and think differently [about foreign cultures].”

Foreign Service Officer Hermes Grullon realized the importance of people-to-people relationships in combating extremist views while in Nicaragua as a Gilman scholar in 2012. He remembers this lesson daily as a political officer in Djibouti. “A lot of people may dislike the U.S. only because they have not been exposed to its diversity,” said Grullon. “Programs like [Gilman] can show them different sides of the U.S. and help those across the world better understand the nuances of U.S. society. Developing closer ties with individuals around the world helps us to combat extremism.”

CLS and Gilman participants representing the full breadth of American culture and society have studied in more than 140 countries in every world region. In academic year 2016–17, participants of CLS and Gilman came from all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. Almost half of Gilman participants and 30 percent of CLS participants were first-generation college students, and nearly 70 percent of Gilman participants and 40 percent of CLS participants self-identified as students of color. More than 200 Gilman and CLS participants also self-identified as having a disability.

“These programs are excellent foreign policy tools, with participants serving as the embodiment of American diversity, culture and values in large and small communities around the world,” said Manley.

To encourage these talented program participants to bring their skills and knowledge to the federal workforce, the U.S. government has awarded alumni of CLS and Gilman, and the U.S. Fulbright student program, Non-Competitive Eligibility, a preferential hiring status for federal jobs. Not only will this initiative recruit alumni with a wealth of cultural and linguistic expertise, it will also help ensure that the Department’s staffing reflects the diversity of America.

Klock, Wan, Trinidad and Grullon come from different backgrounds, but they all use the skills and knowledge they gained studying abroad in their current roles advancing U.S. foreign policy goals at the Department.

“Being a U.S. diplomat regardless of my background—where I was born, being Dominican-American, growing up in low-income housing, or being the first in my family to go to college—reaffirms that the Foreign Service is not just for elites,” said Grullon “It still can be elitist, but my experiences overseas are what give me the audacity to take a seat at the table. I have the confidence I need to walk in and know I belong even when I am the youngest or only person of color in the room.”

■ *Rebecca Gailey is a program officer in the USA Study Abroad branch, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Anna Du was a 2017 Department of State intern.*



Hermes Grullon stands with a past grant recipient holding her handmade portrait of a Djibouti flag at a June 2017 international bazaar at Camp Lemonnier-Djibouti. Photo courtesy of Hermes Grullon