

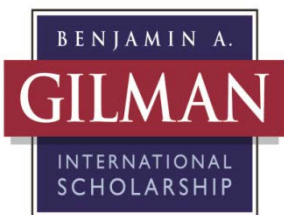
Gilman Alumni Ambassador Program

The Gilman Alumni Ambassador Program is a diverse group of Gilman Scholarship recipients who have studied abroad in various countries around the world. They are official ambassadors of the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program providing presentations and promotional outreach to university and college campuses around the nation to students and advisors interested in learning more about the Gilman Scholarship Program. The Gilman Alumni Ambassadors have been trained by the Gilman Scholarship Program.

If you would like to request a Gilman Alumni Ambassador to present at your campus or if you are interested in becoming a Gilman Alumni Ambassador, please contact Gilman Scholars by email at gilman_scholars@iie.org or call 832-369-3496 if you have any questions.

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Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Marvin Alfaro

United Kingdom, Fall 2009
University of Miami



Studying abroad during college has been one of my greatest desires since I first began thinking about life after high school. As a Latino growing up in a predominantly El Salvadorian town, the dominant cultural influences of my everyday environment paralleled those within my home. Needless to say, exposure to a new culture and new way of life made my semester abroad at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom a transformative experience. Living in a different country and engulfed in an educational system that I was not accustomed to, enhanced my self-awareness and changed my outlook on what I had seen as the normality of life. Academically and professionally, taking classes in the Atmospheric Science field helped me to fully grasp and understand the importance of a scientist's work on a global scale.

As a Meteorology and Mathematics major, it was a challenge to make space in my academic schedule and to have my major courses approved to study abroad but it was well worth it! The Meteorology program at the University of East Anglia is one of the best programs of its kind in the United Kingdom. The school of Environmental Sciences is the largest, most established and comprehensive school of its kind in Europe. Recognized for its science programs, the University of East Anglia has robust research facilities, where I was able to work in the Climate Research Unit and later able to present my work at research conferences back home.

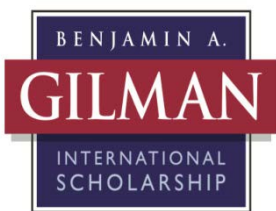
For my Follow-on Project, I conducted a number of informative presentations about the Gilman Scholarship and my study abroad experience. At my home institution, I targeted and reached nearly 5,000 students. In my presentations I found it imperative to share the importance of science on a global scale. Nearly all science related fields depend on cooperation between scientists working around the world and the open exchange of information.

My semester abroad expanded my post-graduation goals. I now aspire for more, strive farther, and to that end hope to volunteer and attend graduate school abroad.

Marvin at the March for Climate Change in London during the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference



Marvin showing his support for England with his custom jersey at the England v. Belarus soccer game



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Kari Dammerman

Norway, Fall 2009
University of Alaska, Southeast



I never knew how much studying abroad for a semester was really going to change my life. In the fall of my fifth year at the University of Alaska, I went on an exchange to Norway through the International Student Exchange Program through my home institution. Looking back on the experience, I laugh at how nervous I had been, but I smile at all of the memories. Living abroad was challenging at first, but once I integrated myself with other students and embraced Norwegian culture, I felt right at home. During my time abroad, I traveled to Denmark,

Sweden, Poland, and the United Kingdom. I was able to glimpse into both the greatness and horror of the world, by seeing the toll World War II had taken on the people and countryside, and at the same time learning about some pretty amazing cultures.



Bergen, Norway

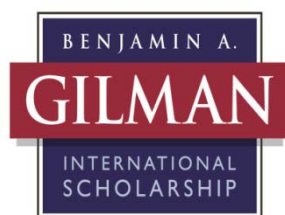
illustrated the main staples that Norwegian live off of: fish, starch, and a little sweet. The Swedish meatballs helped illustrate the rich flavors of Sweden in comparison to the somewhat mellow tastes of Norwegian cuisine. My fellow students were very excited to share a glimpse into Scandinavian culture and receive information about the Gilman Scholarship to study abroad.

My hopes for my Follow-on Project were to inspire international study and promote Scandinavian culture. I hosted a Norwegian Middag: A Night of Scandinavian Culture, where I presented peers with information about the Gilman Scholarship and study abroad. The menu for the Middag included traditional Scandinavian fare: Norsk Fiskesuppe (Norwegian fish soup), Lefse, and boiled potatoes. While the menu was meant to feature only Norwegian cuisine, I added in Svenska Köttbullar (Swedish meatballs) for a great flavor choice and an easy dish for a large crowd. These four dishes were amazing and really

In the future, I hope to become a professor of ichthyological paleontology. My study in Norway provided me with a glimpse into scientific research on a more global level; provided me with contacts for the future, further research opportunities available in different areas; and an understanding of scientific research conducted in different climates than those found in the U.S. The curriculum was also more advanced than the U.S. which challenged me in new ways on an academic-level. I now attend graduate school in Michigan where I study the population ecology of lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*).



Kari and her classmates fishing for cod in the icy Norwegian waters.



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Cynthia Gomez

Brazil, Fall 2008
University of California, Berkley



From the day I arrived, to the day I left, I enjoyed every minute of my study abroad in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. I was lucky to participate in a program that was extremely organized, had great resources, and was run by people who truly care about their participants. One of the best parts of my study abroad program was my home stay, which was an integral part of the program. Although I learned a lot in the classroom it was during my conversations at lunch and dinner with my home stay mom where I learned more than you could ever find listed under a course description. I was able to practice my Portuguese and learn from a primary source about the customs and eccentricities of Brazilian culture.

I chose Brazil because I wanted to learn a new language, and with no previous experience with Portuguese I was determined to learn as much as I possibly could. Academically, the language course was a highlight of the program because of the wonderful professor and the small classroom setting. In just a couple of months I became almost fluent in a language I had never studied before! In addition to the rewarding experiences in the classroom, I also was able to volunteer teaching dance classes to young girls at a non-profit organization, which seeks to empower women of color through music and the arts. Although it was challenging given the limited space and resources available for us, it was both humbling and inspiring to see the enthusiasm of the young girls when they were given the opportunity to express themselves.

My Follow-on Project consisted of focused outreach through a non-profit, Stiles Hall, which provides resources and services to students in underrepresented communities transferring to and attending the University of California, Berkeley. My main goal was to inform and encourage transfer students about the possibility of incorporating study abroad into their undergraduate experience. Informing them about the funding available through the Gilman Scholarship also makes study abroad seem more accessible. I know my project has had a positive impact on students. In fact, after hearing so much about my experience, my brother and his girlfriend made the decision to participate in the same program I completed. They are now both Gilman Scholars who studied abroad in Brazil during the fall 2009 semester.



Cynthia snaps a photo in front of the Sugarloaf in Rio de Janeiro

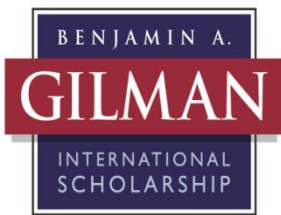
I feel so privileged to have been able to study abroad, and grateful for the funding that helped make it possible through the Gilman Scholarship. I believe it is extremely important for students to have the opportunity to incorporate international education into their studies; it is an invaluable experience. Having

studied abroad in Brazil has exposed me to new interests and possibilities; I want to continue my study of Portuguese language and hope to someday work in Brazil. Although I have always known I wanted to go to graduate school, after returning from Brazil I have broadened my interest in graduate programs, looking at international relations programs of schools like Columbia and Princeton. This will prove beneficial for my interest in a career as a Foreign Affairs Officer.



While in Brazil, Cynthia visited the Iguazu Falls, considered one of the world's largest

Currently, Cynthia works with a university as an admissions counselor.



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Aaron Howard

Dominican Republic, Fall 2006
University of Georgia



The Gilman Scholarship allowed me to explore a world that I never knew existed. Going abroad presented opportunities that were previously unavailable to me and enriched my learning experience with cultural immersion and intensive language classes. Most importantly, my time abroad gave me a sense of direction and purpose. Studying in the Dominican Republic not only took my Spanish speaking to another level, but also it allowed me to see that the world is a place for learning. I learned not only in the classroom, but I learned in the streets, bodegas, and in my host home. Essentially, my environment became my classroom and I embraced every opportunity to learn. While abroad, I had the chance to volunteer for a HIV/AIDS Awareness organization which changed my view of healthcare and furthered my interest in HIV/AIDS outreach. Studying in the Dominican Republic altered how I view international communities and also transformed how I embrace life. My experience showed me the joys of aiding the international citizenry and I now focus my volunteer efforts on serving international communities.

For my Follow-on Project, I provided information for studying abroad on my university website; produced a DVD series illustrating my experience abroad; and did a presentation to high school students. Prior to leaving for the Dominican Republic, I developed a link on my Facebook profile to include information about the Gilman Scholarship Program, and also other information about international study. At the time, I had 30 members of the Facebook group interested in studying abroad. The second portion of my project included two short DVDs which illustrate the wonderful experience of studying abroad in the Dominican Republic. The DVDs focused on the cultural aspect of Dominican life: the music, the dances, and the people. Gathering the footage for the DVDs took me the full duration of my international study because I wanted each scene to capture the essence of the Caribbean culture. The last portion of the project included a presentation to high school students in Southern New Jersey, where I grew up, and in Georgia, where I attended university. I showed the DVD and expressed the joys of studying abroad. I gave DVDs to the Study Abroad department at the University of Georgia in order to educate and encourage potential study abroad students to go to the Dominican Republic. I had a great time constructing my presentation to interest students to study abroad. Hopefully, these prospective students will experience the same enthusiasm of traveling and learning that I experienced.

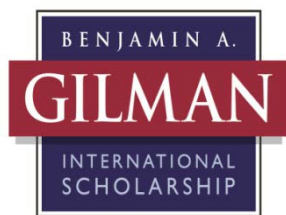
Without the Gilman Scholarship, studying abroad would have been just a dream. During college, it was difficult to just pay tuition. Therefore, studying internationally was a figment of my imagination until I learned about the Gilman Scholarship. I am forever grateful for the doors that the Gilman Scholarship has opened for me, which include applying for diplomatic fellowships and international internships. I am currently working for a nonprofit organization in Washington D.C. that focuses on youth education.



Aaron playing with the kids in his neighborhood.



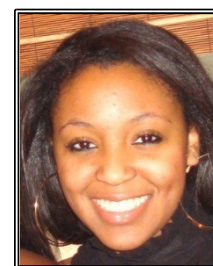
Aaron playing baseball in his Dominican barrio



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Abike Kamson

Egypt, Fall 2009
George Washington University



My study abroad experience in Cairo impacted me tremendously. I discovered that I truly do have a love and a passion for the Middle East and the Arabic language. I not only was able to take Arabic language courses and



Abike with friends at the Fayoum Oasis

courses pertaining to the Middle East at the American University in Cairo, but I was also able to explore Cairo and other Egyptian cities. This allowed me to interact with the Egyptian people and expand my learning outside of the classroom as I learned first-hand about the opinions of the people as well as the Egyptian Arabic dialect. I made amazing relationships this way that will no doubt be lifelong friendships.

For my Follow-on Project, I wrote a featured article in the multicultural newspaper at my university called *The Ace*. Through this article I wanted to encourage more minority students to study abroad and to do so in less common or non-traditional countries, because I was shocked by how few minorities were studying in Cairo. I also wanted to share what I had learned about relationships and the Egyptian social culture that I felt would be relevant

to the students at my school. I wanted my project to reach freshman and sophomore college students, those both considering and not considering studying abroad. I received a lot of positive feedback from my article and I will now be serving as the Senior Editor of Culture for the newspaper. I hope to feature several different cultures from the George Washington University class in each issue as well as write several pieces on political, cultural, and religious news going on internationally.



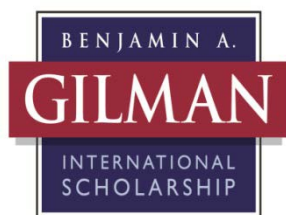
Camel riding at the Giza pyramids

My study abroad experience has certainly influenced my decision to pursue academic studies and a career in the Middle East. I am currently in the process of applying for the U.S. Student Fulbright grant and I hope to receive my masters in Arabic studies at the American University in Cairo and conduct research pertaining to orphans. I truly wish I could work and live in the Middle East and I hope both my academic and professional endeavors will lead me back there, particularly to Egypt. I am forever grateful to the U.S. Department of State and the Institute of International Education for providing me with the Gilman Scholarship. It allowed me to have a most unforgettable experience and helped to cement my hopes for the future.



Abike and other international scholarship recipients with Assistant Secretary Ann Stock, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

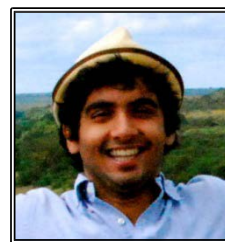
In November 2010, Abike was one of five Gilman Scholars who had the honor of kicking-off International Education Week in Washington D.C. at events hosted by the U.S. State Department, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Institute of International Education.



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Naveed Nanjee

South Africa, Spring 2010
Vanderbilt University



During my study abroad I was able to take advantage of a diverse range of opportunities because of the Gilman Scholarship. I summated Africa's roof, Mt. Kilimanjaro; was able to experience a home-stay in a township, help start a sustainable consulting firm; started a swap-shop in a township; and hosted a radio show at 3 AM to name a few. All of these experiences academically enhanced my career plans by furthering my study in Sustainable Development. Interning at the Sustainability Institute provided an opportunity to further my creativity and passion for sustainable development both professionally and academically. Because of this experience I was able to draft several business proposals to retrofit one of the largest business parks in the Western Cape in South Africa. My Gilman Follow-on Project was to continue my service work with the community of Manenberg and build the service-learning project I started the summer prior. During my study abroad I blogged about all my various experiences and this blog was a great way to spread the word about the opportunities of the Gilman Scholarship.

The community of Manenberg has a tremendous education problem that has expanded beyond the transformation capabilities of the community organizing that is currently underway. My project was to continue engaging with the community of Manenberg, and I did so by teaching 7th grade at Manenberg Primary. Teaching 7th grade in Manenberg has been a challenge due to the wide range of academic levels, from students who understand the literacy curriculum to those who simply cannot read. As the learners in grade seven graduate from Manenberg primary and enter into high school, they tend to be recruited by junior gangs, and are encouraged to drop of school. This continues the cycle of violence in the communities. Literacy development has the power to change the future of Manenberg, because literacy has intangible and multifaceted benefits in addition to achieving in school. The program I have been teaching in incorporates themes of self-empowerment, and struggle, which is relevant to the community.



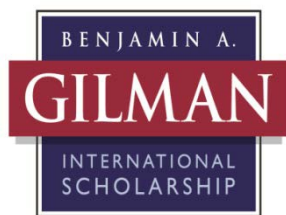
At the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak!

In addition I have implemented a program called "Let's Talk about Varsity," where the learners are introduced to the local colleges and universities as well as the different career paths available at different colleges and universities. This introduction is followed up with discussions at home with the parents of the learners. Finally the program is concluded with a visit to a local university. I worked with the University of Stellenbosch, my host institution while in South Africa, to bring the kids at Manenberg Primary to the university for a tour and lecture about life in the university with one of my professors. This program hopes to instill a sense of hope with tangible goal to attend a university.



Because of the Gilman Scholarship I was able to study abroad, and my experiences in the communities I engaged with were life changing. I am even more passionate to pursue a career in Sustainable Development. Due to my experience abroad I am applying for the U.S. Student Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship to Indonesia.

Naveed and his 7th grade class at Manenberg primary



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Clay Ngo

China, Academic Year 2008-2009
San Francisco State University



Growing up Chinese American and unable to speak my native language, I felt disconnected from my heritage. I studied Chinese language in the US for three years, but my learning curve did not spike to a conversational level. In contrast to my Chinese studies in the US, I started speaking and living the themes in my books while living in China. When on the streets, I learned to become a hard bargainer with the merchants, and while indoors, I learned to be polite and charm the parents of my new Chinese friends.

I will forever be connected to China and now seek to continuously engage myself within the international realm. As a double major in Film and Chinese, I fittingly proposed to create videos chronicling my experiences studying abroad in Beijing, China, in order to inform others about the "ins and outs" of studying abroad. During my year in China, I took every opportunity to record footage of the society and the lives of the everyday people. I also recorded interviews with my classmates to access different perspectives. I created three ten minute films under the themes: "Peking University" which outlines the campus and shows the different amenities available on campus; "Initiation Week" is a clip that chronicles the various steps students must follow when starting the semester, through the placement exams to the way the class schedule and selection process works; and "Wu Dao Kou" which displays the major commercial market next to Peking University. All the films are available on my YouTube page and are also available at my school's Office of International Studies building. During my school's International Education Week, conferences were held for the various countries around the world and I led the China conference. I gave an introduction to studying in China and offered my videos as supplemental material. Afterward, there was a question and answer session where I answered inquiries from curious students. I have promoted the Gilman Scholarship by including a Gilman Scholarship sponsorship within the credits of each film. As my viewership grows, I hope my videos will become more prominent from search engine results so that more people can learn about studying abroad and the possibility of applying for a Gilman Scholarship.

At the end of my study abroad year, I was invited by a Peking University student organization to help teach English in the rural area of China. I initially volunteered in order to discover new regions of China; I later realized the deeper benefits of helping the under-served community. I saw a different, less developed China during my volunteer service. Infrastructure was poor and the standard of living was far lower than in the city in which I had studied. In our dorms, we slept on bunk beds made of a plank of wood and pillows made of wicker. Living and teaching in the community, I was able to share my experiences and form bonds with the local Chinese people. The community was as interested in my life as a Chinese American as much as I was interested in their lives in rural China.

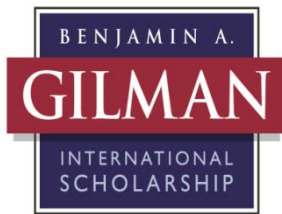


Clay's English class, when he volunteered as a teacher.



Clay with his class at Peking University

As my graduation date approaches in this struggling U.S. economy, I am not afraid to look outside the United States for work. I await my return to China so that I can start a new chapter of immersion learning. I am eternally grateful to the Gilman Scholarship for providing me this opportunity.



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Joshua Rosales

Spain, Fall 2007
DePaul University



As a Hispanic-American of Guatemalan heritage, I believe my experience studying abroad in Spain was unique in comparison to that of my non-Hispanic classmates. In Spain, as an American of Latin American descent I was regarded as Latino and not truly seen as a bi-cultural American. This dynamic was interesting and took some adjustment, but it also prompted me to do some investigating. At my Spanish University, I was required to take five classes but decided to take three additional courses offered in the afternoons. I felt that the main reason I was in Spain was to learn as much as I could and to better understand my Hispanic identity. Among these classes was a course about Spain's transition from a dictatorship to a democracy and its subsequent political implications. The course allowed me to comprehend the contemporary Spanish perspective and sparked an interest to learn more about it. Living with a host family, I was able to discuss these issues and receive their input about the topic. This opportunity to have a cultural exchange is something that I will never forget. Not only was I understanding them, they were beginning to understand me. Additionally, I was able to share my American and Guatemalan cultures. They were amazed by the "two worlds" I had experienced in my life and began to see me as a bi-cultural Guatemalan-American.



Joshua and a classmate at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid.

While in Madrid, I took advantage of all the opportunities available. I was able to meet with several U.S. diplomats stationed in Spain and spoke with them about opportunities with the U.S. Department of State. I was able to tour the U.S. Embassy and see what it is like to work as a Foreign Service officer. At the same time I was able to meet with Guatemalan diplomats who spoke to me about the relationship that Spain had with Guatemala. Both of these experiences made it clear to me that diplomacy, international affairs and cooperation is what really interests me.

For my Follow-on Project, I informed members of the local Guatemalan community about my experiences, the importance of studying abroad and about funding opportunities like the Gilman Scholarship. I published an article in the most read news source in the Guatemalan community in Chicago. This magazine has been circulating uninterrupted for eight years and reaches thousands of Guatemalans and Central Americans every month. I

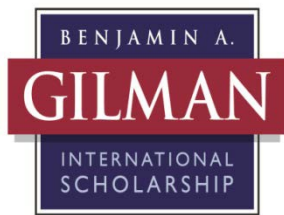
published the article in Spanish. I felt that this article would reach parents, business owners and even younger readers. My hope is that parents will see the importance of studying abroad and the opportunities that are available for their children.

My time abroad was one of the most enriching experiences I have ever had. The opportunity to live in Spain, study and interact with people from so many places was amazing. I know that this experience has reaffirmed my desire to pursue an international oriented career. I want to continue having international experiences. I believe that a career in Inter-American Affairs is what I would like to pursue, and am preparing myself to enter that field by continuing my French studies and recently have begun learning Portuguese. My experience in Spain has made me want to learn more languages so that I can explore more cultures. In addition to the Romance Languages I am now mastering, I hope to one day speak Mandarin as well as Arabic. In the coming year, I plan to apply to the Fulbright Fellowship in order to carry-out a research project and have another experience abroad.



Joshua and his Spanish host family.

Thank you to the Gilman Scholarship for this incredible opportunity. The Gilman Scholarship made it possible for me to study and be an ambassador of the U.S. in Spain.



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Jovonte Santos

Oman, Fall 2008
Alcorn State University



As a southern boy from the state of Mississippi, the thought of traveling to an Islamic country was taboo and unheard of. Coming into contact with a society with views far different from my own enabled me to understand more about myself and about the world. These experiences gave me the exposure to not only embrace other cultures, ideals, and ways of life, but evaluate with my own biases, views, and frameworks of thought.

I saw the real impact of my time abroad in a contemporary literature course I took when I returned to the U.S. In this course we read Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, and an excerpt from Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The comparison of these texts opened debate about controversial topics such as the role of a woman's veil, jihad, and Islam; they present ideas that question traditions in the Middle East. Because of my time in Oman, I feel I had a greater comprehension of these texts than my peers.

While abroad, I had the opportunity to live in a home stay with a family. Initially, I was quite nervous, but from the moment I was greeted by my family until my departure, our time together was priceless. At home we had many tough and interesting discussions. Regardless of our differences, we were able to understand one another. Without the Gilman Scholarship, I would have never gotten the chance to meet my second family, with whom I still maintain contact with. My home stay brothers and sisters have vowed that when we all have children, we hope that our children will get to meet one another.



Jovonte with members of his host family.

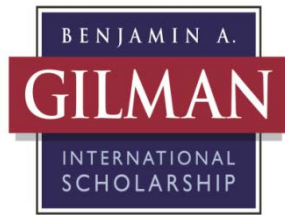
My Follow-on Project stressed exposure to a part of the Middle Eastern world by creating forums and activities that sparked an interest in international education, while keeping the Gilman Scholarship as a focal point of my discussion. I collaborated with the head of the Global Studies Program at Alcorn State University, a historically black university, to integrate courses which will allow students to have exposure to Middle Eastern topics. I also spoke with local high school students about my study abroad experience and the opportunities available for study abroad during college.



Jovonte with classmates attending a cultural lunch exchange.

I had the opportunity to showcase my time abroad to the English department at my school in a presentation entitled, "Living with the Other: Orientalism, Discourse and the Reconstruction of Dialogue." Many of my professors agreed that my awareness and ability to synthesize information improved drastically. Teachers, advisors, administrators and students all agreed that I was not the same 'Santos' they remembered.

My study abroad experience unlocked a strong passion in intercultural communication and mediation. I am currently pursuing graduate studies in conflict resolution, which I plan to later further with a law degree focusing in alternative dispute resolution (ADR).



Gilman Alumni Ambassador

Angela Weir

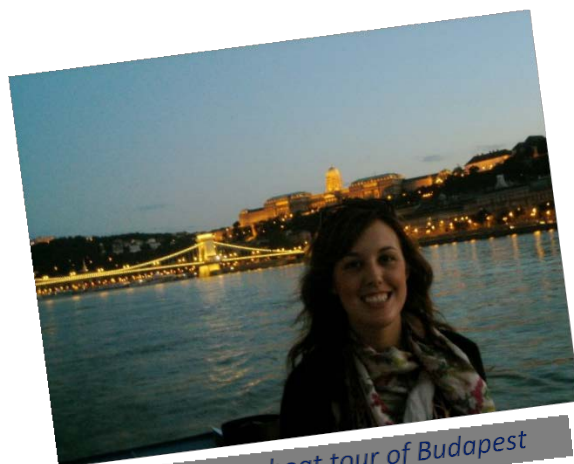
Hungary, Fall 2009
DePaul University



I always knew I wanted to study abroad but the closer I got to it, the more unattainable it seemed. Money, graduating on time, being so far from home for so many months were all factors I took into consideration before I chose my program. Thankfully, I received the Gilman Scholarship which allowed me to have an unbelievable experience studying abroad in Hungary. It was an experience that absolutely changed my life.

I learned more about myself in my four months in Hungary than I have in three years at DePaul. I believe that studying in other countries is an opportunity that as many people as possible should experience. Not only does it benefit the person, but while in Europe I realized how much I was teaching those I interacted with as well. For example, in my program I lived in a dorm with two Hungarian students for roommates. On nights when we were all together, we struggled with language barriers but were able to ask each other questions about our cultures- an opportunity that we would not have had in regular circumstances. I attended Corvinus University in Budapest, Hungary, a school that specializes in business and economics. As an English major, my economics courses in Budapest provided me an understanding of economics that I was lacking prior to going abroad. At Corvinus, I completed two elective courses, history and photography, for my university requirements at DePaul. I can't describe how exciting it was to be taught European history in Europe, and to photograph the landscapes of Hungary rather than Illinois. I also had the chance to take a class on the European Union with students from six countries in Europe, and one from Turkey- all offering unique perspectives on the debates surrounding the European Union.

While abroad, I participated in the Reach the World partnership with the Gilman Scholarship. Reach the World is a nonprofit organization with the mission of linking students and teachers to online, global journeys that have the power to expand learning beyond the four walls of the classroom. For this program I posted weekly journals for a young students in New York City classrooms, giving teachers information to incorporate into their curriculum and for kids to learn more about another part of the world through a new friend. I was constantly trying to think about what children would notice, find interesting, or want to learn about every day. I am extremely passionate about the benefits of studying abroad, as well as the fact that financial burdens should not be a deterrent when there are great programs such as the Gilman Scholarship available to help.



Angela on a boat tour of Budapest



Angela during Budapest's first snow of the season