



## 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 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' 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](mailto:gilman_scholars@iie.org) if you have any questions.

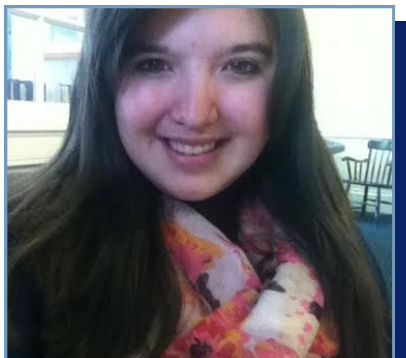
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## GABBY AGUILERA, KYRGYZSTAN, 2014

University of New Hampshire  
New Hampshire

BENJAMIN A.  
**GILMAN**  
INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



**D**uring the 2014 summer term, I spent two months studying and interning abroad in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. I studied History of Central Asia and Russian Language at the American University of Central Asia and interned five days a week at the Soros Foundation. My study and intern abroad experience gave me a sense of confidence in myself and my abilities, and gave me a chance to grow both personally and professionally.

My research at the Soros Foundation opened up a new area of interest for me that I had never even considered before. Most of my work focused on identifying the most effective ways to use

media in post-conflict rehabilitation. I used what I learned in my research to help develop media strategies that would promote diversity and peace in Kyrgyzstan and lessen the ethnic tensions that were remnants of the 2010 conflict between the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz. Some of these strategies included promoting local media outlets that spread messages of peace and assisting with a workshop for journalists which taught the importance of writing pieces that were unbiased and maintained a high level of journalistic integrity.

I greatly enjoyed my academic and internship experience, but the part of my experience that completely changed my life was utterly unexpected. During my second week in Kyrgyzstan, I quite literally stumbled into an English teaching job. I discovered that I greatly enjoyed teaching and am passionate about helping people learn. Before this, I had never even considered teaching as a potential career path, but it is something I am definitely considering now.

The most significant attribute I gained from my study and intern abroad experience was a sense of confidence in myself and an ability to adapt to new and unexpected situations. There is a feeling of immense freedom that comes from knowing that you are independent and capable enough to live and work in a country and a culture that is radically different from your own. It makes you feel like the whole world is open to you. I know that I am not done traveling to other countries and experiencing other cultures.

I am very fortunate that the Gilman Scholarship helped defray the cost of my experience abroad. I plan to encourage others to take advantage of this life-changing opportunity.

***“The most significant attribute I gained from my study and intern abroad experience was a sense of confidence in myself and an ability to adapt to new and unexpected situations.”***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I took a slightly different route than most. I applied to be a [Gilman Global Experience Blog Correspondent](#) and was fortunate enough to be chosen to share my experiences in Kyrgyzstan through this venue. The Gilman Global

Experience Blog showcases stories from current Gilman scholars abroad to spread awareness of the opportunity and encourage students to apply. I had never blogged before, so it was a completely new endeavor for me. I found that I greatly enjoyed

blogging and hope to continue here in the U.S. I used the blog to talk about different parts of my experience, such as my initial expectations, my encounters with culture shock, and how my life in Kyrgyzstan differed from my life back in the US.

## KELSEY BALL, MOROCCO, 2014

Ohio University, Athens  
Ohio



**H**aving the opportunity to learn and live in another country was an experience that I used to believe was out of my reach. That was until I was given information on the Gilman Scholarship, which ended up allowing me to be a part of an internship abroad program in Meknes, Morocco. For an entire month, I was able to observe and help practice Physical Therapy with children who have various mental and physical disabilities.

As an Exercise Physiology major, it was eye opening and exciting to have the chance to work with other students in many various

majors so different than my own. Although studying abroad was not required, it was an important goal for me personally. I have always felt that understanding other people and their culture is a vital and admirable quality to possess regardless of career ambition. During my abroad experience, I was given the opportunity to live with a wonderful host family, who taught me so much about the Moroccan culture through their cooking and extremely caring personalities. I was able to learn and truly feel that the knowledge I gained will benefit not only my career, but also my understanding of the world around me.

I was able to travel to other cities in Morocco such as Ifrane, Chefchaouen, and Merzouga. Each of these places were once-in-a-lifetime experiences that I would not trade for anything. Studying abroad would not have been possible for me if it were not for the Gilman Scholarship. It allowed me to achieve a dream I strived for ever since beginning college. The Gilman Scholarship solidified my firm belief that everyone is

capable of reaching their goals if they set their mind to it.

Currently I am finishing my last year of college, and studying abroad has absolutely affected my career choices. I am looking into traveling to South America in order to help teach a Diabetes Prevention Program. I am definitely a huge advocate for helping students and showing those in the Exercise Physiology major that it is possible, and also extremely beneficial, to study abroad in our field. I cannot wait to work with students in their journey to achieve their goals of studying abroad.

***"I have always felt that understanding other people and their culture is a vital and admirable quality to possess regardless of career ambition."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

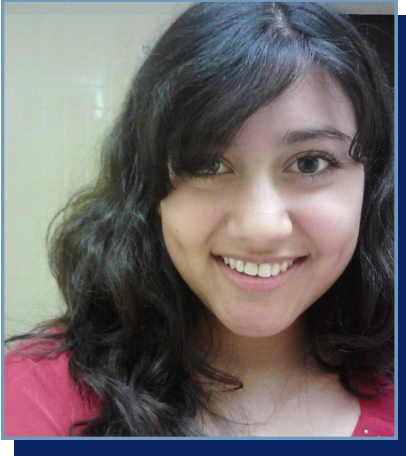
As the President of our Exercise Physiology Club at Ohio University, part of my Follow-on Service Project entailed conducting a club meeting about the opportunities to study or intern abroad in the health care

field and funding opportunities, such as the Gilman Scholarship. So many students are interested in studying or interning abroad, but feel that it is not possible within this particular major. I am hopeful that showing students in

my field the many opportunities being offered to them and how these experiences abroad can help them personally, professionally, and academically will encourage them to go abroad.

## ELIZABETH BARRERA, INDIA, 2014

University of Texas at Austin  
Texas



**S**tudying abroad in India was definitely the beginning of the realization of many of my goals. I experienced a culture completely outside of the American and Mexican societies I had grown up with, and I bonded with my fellow engineering classmates in an environment that many of us found to be exotic. I received credit for an embedded systems class that I needed for my Biomedical Engineering major. In addition, I was able to experience first-hand the work of a programmer as I was writing code to improve the current heart-rate monitor system during my internship with Ineda Systems.

I was finally able to explore another continent, something I had always wanted to do, but was never able to due to my financial needs. I definitely would not have been able to participate in this program without the Gilman Scholarship, and I appreciate the financial support I received for my program in India. While I was there, I visited many temples, forts, and local markets that opened my eyes to the many differences (and similarities) between cultures across the globe.

While the majority of religions in India and the Western Hemisphere are drastically different from one another, I found two things to be quite similar between India and Mexico: the spicy food and the street markets that people go to while buying groceries. They had a wide variety of goods to offer to the customers. The friendships I made while in India are some of the strongest I have ever had, and I would not have been able to meet the intelligent, talented people that were in the program if it had not been for the Gilman Scholarship.

My experiences in India have definitely encouraged me to pursue more opportunities abroad, particularly internships. I know with certainty that I will venture outside of the United States in order to pursue more international opportunities in the future.

I am currently looking for more internship and research opportunities in Biomedical Engineering that would allow me to improve my skills and be able to contribute greatly to my field. I aim to spread the work I do to my community and to the world.

***"I was able to experience first-hand the work of a programmer as I was writing code to improve the current heart-rate monitor system during my internship with Ineda Systems."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

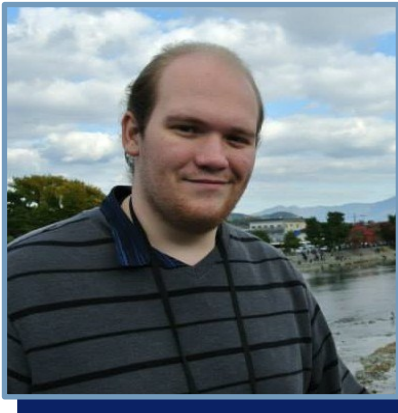
My Follow-on Service Project consisted of hosting a booth during a Study Abroad Fair at the University of Texas at Austin in which I explained details of the Gilman Scholarship for people who were interested, and described my experiences abroad. There were

many engineering students that attended the study abroad fair, so the booth allowed me to encourage them to look for a program abroad that fit with their career aspirations. I know how challenging it is to find study abroad programs as an engineering major. I hope that

listening to my story and learning about how I found my particular program has encouraged engineers to not give up on education abroad, and that funding opportunities, such as the Gilman Scholarship, are available to them.

## HUGH BLACKBURN, JAPAN, 2013

Towson State University  
Maryland



**S**tudy abroad is an essential part of the modern educational experience. It provides critical and valuable multicultural knowledge that serves to enrich both the student as well as the international community. My year spent abroad was no exception, and is an outstanding example of why study abroad is so critical.

During my spring 2013 study abroad program, I lived with a host family in Hirakata city in Osaka prefecture while studying at Kansai Gaidai University. I later extended my term abroad into the fall 2013 semester and moved into a dormitory. Both living arrangements gave me a unique

view of the study abroad experience.

In a very short period of time, my host family became very much like a real family to me and the daily interactions I had with them were enormously helpful to my personal and professional goals of becoming fluent in Japanese. It was this immersion that helped my classroom Japanese studies translate into a true fluency. The Asian Studies program that I participated in also furthered my academic goals by quickly filling in my required classes for my major and deeply enriching my understanding of Japanese art, religion, as well as regional politics and history.

I made friends from all corners of the globe in an incredible multicultural experience that has helped shape my worldview. In particular, my trip to Hiroshima was a truly humbling and awe-inspiring experience. As part of our program I was able to hear the experiences of a *hibakusha*, one of the survivors of the Atomic bomb. Listening to her story of courage in

the face of tragedy helped me come to a new understanding of the world, human strength, and the precious nature of life itself.

***“My host family became very much like a real family to me and the daily interactions I had with them were enormously helpful to my personal and professional goals of becoming fluent in Japanese.”***

I will never be able to forget the countless friends I made and the places I saw. Going to Japan had been a dream for me since adolescence, and I brought with me a bucket list of places to visit and things to do. I exhausted the list in two months and was forced to go write a new one, twice.

Thanks to my time in Japan, supported by the Gilman Scholarship, I was able to expand my horizons in ways that I had not thought possible. The experience I gained will serve me well throughout the rest of my career.

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I wanted to give back to the community college that had given me the opportunity to pursue higher education before moving on to Towson State. I wanted to reach out to minorities at my previous community college and

inspire them towards studying abroad, something that had not occurred to many, and for others had seemed unfeasible for financial reasons. I took photographs during my time in Japan and used these to share my experiences in

seven classrooms around campus with students from a diverse set of backgrounds and life experiences. I believe that my speaking had a strong impact on the students—several contacted me with further questions after the event.

## NATALIE CAWKER, COSTA RICA, 2014

University of Portland  
Montana



**D**uring the summer after my junior year, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Heredia, Costa Rica with the support of a Gilman Scholarship. I spent my time abroad taking classes that enhanced my proficiency in the Spanish language, allowing me to complete several classes for my Spanish minor. I completed an advanced Spanish grammar course, and a discussion-based class where we discussed socioeconomic issues that are especially prevalent in modern Latin America. Outside of class, I continued my immersion in the Spanish language by communicating with my host-family or my “familia tica”.

I believe one of the most valuable components of my study abroad program was my host-family experience. I was able to fully immerse myself into a new culture, yet I was supported and encouraged by my host family to ask any questions I had about certain observations that I did not fully understand. My host family had an extensive family network, including several bilingual children who could help me with my Spanish when I was having trouble communicating. My host family also took me on several weekend outings to see different parts of the country, including remote beaches that only locals had access to.

My time studying abroad in Costa Rica was crucial for my ability to complete a Spanish minor and learn a foreign language while studying science at the University of Portland. As a biochemistry major, I found that a summer study abroad program was best suited for my academic needs, and allowed me to have experiences I could not have otherwise had. The Gilman Scholarship allowed me to pursue a study abroad program without incurring strenuous financial burdens during my time as an undergraduate student.

My experience in Costa Rica has inspired me to pursue academic research in laboratories overseas after graduation. I am extremely interested in connecting with research teams overseas because it will not only allow me to expand my scientific knowledge but will also allow me to continue learning about a different country and will foster diverse cultural experiences.

I continue to use the lessons that I learned during my time studying abroad, such as the ability to communicate with others in different languages, and acceptance of cultural practices that may otherwise seem peculiar or confusing. Having studied abroad with a Gilman Scholarship, I have learned the importance of the exploration of new cultures in order to fully understand the world around me, and the political relationships between different nations.

***“My time abroad has inspired me to pursue academic research in laboratories overseas after graduation.”***

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

During my time abroad, I served as a Reach the World mentor, a position where I communicated with a classroom of elementary students located in the Bronx who wanted to learn more about study abroad opportunities. With Reach the World, I composed articles detailing different aspects of my time abroad,

such as the different food I ate or animals I had seen. I also video-chatted with the students several times during my time abroad where I answered their questions and even demonstrated the different dance moves I had learned during a dance class! During my time as a Reach the World mentor, I was able to truly

reflect upon all of the experiences I had abroad, and to compare how different life in Costa Rica was from my small hometown in Missoula, Montana. I cultivated cultural awareness I could not have otherwise discovered with my time abroad, made possible by a Gilman Scholarship.

## TYLER CLARK, SPAIN, 2014

Valparaiso University  
Indiana



I lived in Zaragoza, Spain for almost 5 months. While there, I was enrolled in classes at Zaragoza University in the Centro de Español como Lengua Extranjera. When I initially decided to study abroad, I told myself that that experience would help me decide whether or not I would continue my dream job: to become an international interpreter someday.

My knowledge of the Spanish language improved vastly, and I have been praised on my improved speaking abilities quite a few times since returning to the United States. I was in a Spanish intensive course, designed for students

whose native language is not Spanish. I had class everyday in Spanish grammar. The class had a very international feel because all of the other students were from non-Spanish speaking countries as well.

The entire experience of being abroad not only increased my understanding of other cultures and the Spanish language, but also helped to strengthen me as a person. I was forced to think on my feet a lot more and was faced with situations I had never had to deal with while in the United States, and that is a skill that I will always carry with and will definitely prove to be invaluable in the future.

Living with a host family forced me to rely on what little Spanish I knew to help them understand me when I was not exactly sure how to get my meaning across. After living in Zaragoza for a few weeks, I started tutoring a boy named Andrew in English. He and I became good friends. During our sessions we had the chance to see how our native languages related to each other in ways we had not acknowledged previously.

Now that I have returned to the United States, I have started my senior year at Valparaiso University while also serving as a Peer Adviser for the Study Abroad Office here on campus and as a Gilman Alumni Ambassador. After I graduate, I hope to go abroad again as part of the JET program. I hope that enrolling in that program will help immerse me in the Japanese culture, as well as improve my beginners Japanese skills. I would like to also teach English to Japanese children and hopefully inspire them to study abroad someday.

***"The entire experience of being abroad not only increased my understanding of other cultures and the Spanish language, but also helped to strengthen me as a person."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

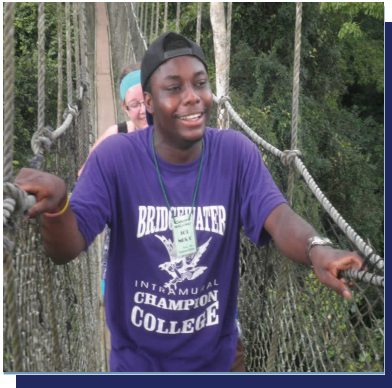
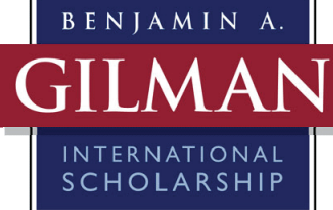
The Gilman Scholarship helped me financially. I was able to focus more on my experiences while abroad, without having to worry about my financial obligations. For my Follow-on Service Project, I became a Gilman Global

Experience Blog Correspondent. I wrote about my different experiences I had while in Spain, including homesickness, culture shock, and new friendships. I hope that seeing my blog will promote the Gilman Scholarship and inspire

other students to study abroad, as well as assuage any doubts or fears they have. As a Peer Advisor in the study abroad office, I help prepare and advise students who are going abroad and prepare a "pre-departure" class.

# CHARLES DONKOR, GHANA, 2013

Bridgewater College  
Virginia



Without the Gilman Scholarship my study abroad dreams would not have become a reality. My year abroad was by far one of the best experiences I have had in my life. For the first time in my life I feel like I have done something that had a positive impact on the lives of others through volunteering, interning and my Gilman Follow-on Service Project.

During my time abroad, I volunteered for the United States Embassy of Ghana for the summer through the fall semester. Due to this opportunity, I

decided to extend my stay in Ghana so I could take advantage of this amazing experience. I had the chance to work with the education advising center at the Embassy, advising local students who were interested in studying in the U.S. and assisting students with the application process to institutions in the U.S. Additionally, I helped prepare students who had already been accepted into a program through orientations and advising. It was rewarding to know that my guidance and knowledge of U.S. culture and education systems helped prepare Ghanaian students for their next chapter of their lives.

While living in Ghana, I also realized that there are many people in the country with great potential, yet there are very limited resources to help these individuals achieve any real success. Education has advanced since I lived there, but still has not progressed to match the potential of the people. With Ghana being my

place of birth, it hurts me to see how the country is not taking full advantage of all of its resources. Because Ghana does not have the knowledge capital or costly equipment to extract their own natural resources like gold and oil, foreigners have taken over such resources and only a small portion of the revenue goes back into the Ghanaian economy. I am hoping that my efforts will have an impact on improving educational resources in Ghana. Because of my experience, I have decided to pursue a career as a Foreign Service Officer, so that I can assist people of third world countries on behalf of the U.S. government.

*"It was rewarding to know that my guidance and knowledge of U.S. culture and education systems helped prepare Ghanaian students for their next chapter of their lives."*

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

Education is a smart starting point. With education comes tools to solve everyday problems in society. This is why I initiated my Follow-on Service Project aiming to engage children in school through sports. Being an athlete and soccer enthusiast, I think soccer has the potential to encourage student involvement. However, most of the rural schools in Ghana do not have the funding for the equipment or staff to run athletic programs. I strongly believe that if sports became a larger part of school in Ghana, school attendance would surely increase.

I had the opportunity to visit several schools while in Ghana and proposed these ideas to them.

In addition, I donated some soccer gear to the schools. Upon my return to the U.S., I visited my high school sports director to restart *Athlete to Athleta*, a program that donates equipment to less affluent schools. We collected soccer equipment and donated many shipments to schools in Ghana and within our home communities. Through *Athlete to Athleta* we will try and link the athletes of Dominion High School and schools in

Ghana and give the students of Dominion the option of "adopting" the athletes of Ghana. I plan on returning to Ghana in January to donate more soccer gear as an ambassador for *Athlete to Athleta*.

In the future I would like to expand outside Ghana to other African countries. Being in the U.S. for ten years now, I have realized the perception Americans have of Africa. This program can help fix many misconceptions and hopefully have more American students interested in going to Africa.

## CAITLYN EBERT, POLAND, 2013

Daemen College  
New York

BENJAMIN A.  
**GILMAN**  
INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



**T**he program I picked allowed me to experience two distinct cultures, become very immersed in the history of WWII, and give back to an underserved population. The town that I spent the majority of my abroad experience in was divided between occupying Nazi and Soviet troops. The markers and divisions can still be felt in the town today. This town had one of the largest population of Jewish residents in Poland. Now there are only a handful of Jews living there and the cemetery has fallen into disrepair. The vandalizing of this cemetery by the Nazis and Soviets was never

completed fixed. Mapping of cemeteries has become a particularly interesting field because of genealogical research. For Jewish families there can be a gap in the knowledge because of unmarked graves, vandalized graves, and mass graves. Mapping projects work to restore as many names to graves as possible. Being able to participate, even for a short time, in this work was an opportunity that I wanted to experience.

Exploring the cities and towns was one of my favorite parts of studying abroad. I was surprised how "citizenship" or "ethnicity" was viewed in Poland, which was very important in our mapping project. In America, if your family traveled over 100 years ago you identify as American with Italian or German roots. Many Jewish families settled in Poland hundreds of years before the start of WWII and were never considered "Polish." This is still true in modern times, and with different ethnicities. Trying to understand this distinction, which seems minor in a lot of ways, has

taught me to not assume things are what I expect them to be and to be more open-minded about what I might not know.

I am hoping to work in areas of law that allow me to continue helping people of different backgrounds understand one another. Individuals going through immigration are put into high stress situations that they are not familiar with and then faced with legal challenges. There is often a language barrier, but also the technical jargon in law that inhibit understanding. I think that I am in an ideal position to empathize with my clients' struggle to comprehend the complexities of law.

***"The program I picked allowed me to experience two distinct cultures, become very immersed in the history of WWII, and give back to an underserved population."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

My Follow-on Service Project was study abroad outreach to Daemen College students. I was asked to attend several events in the community that pertained to expanding this program.

The History and Political Science department at Daemen featured me as a Gilman recipient in their blog. I participated in the study abroad fair and sat on a study abroad panel that spoke to freshmen students. My poster is in publication, through the

Global Programs Office, but has not been completed yet. The blog is live at the History and Political Science department webpage. These activities all targeted current and future students at Daemen College.

The other students that participated in this program, as well as myself, were asked to speak to the Buffalo Polish Arts Club about our experiences in Poland. This was an exciting way to practice professional speaking skills and share something I am passionate

about with others.

Near the end of the semester, one of the professors, Dr. Tomasz Pudlocki, who taught our program in Poland, was able to come to Daemen to give a guest lecture. I was asked to attend the reception before his lecture to greet professors from Poland, members of the community, and the guest professor. This was another exciting way to share my experience in Poland as a Gilman Scholar.

## MEGAN GRABLE, CHINA, 2012

University of Missouri-Columbia  
Missouri



**F**or my study abroad program I chose the IES Summer Language Intensive Program in Beijing, China. I realized that the best place to practice Mandarin would be in a city rich in history, culture, and a place unlike anywhere I had ever traveled. Beijing became my home and I met so many wonderful people that I now consider family.

When I first arrived in Beijing I was on my own for a week which encouraged me to meet people, explore new opportunities, and practice my language skills. I never wanted to forget my experience so I began documenting everything on my personal blog. Writing everyday allowed me to share my experiences with others, promote study abroad, and connect with friends and family

back home. I later found out that the Gilman Program was in search for a correspondent for the Gilman Global Experience Blog. To my excitement, I received the position and began promoting my study abroad experience towards an even larger population.

I wrote thematic Word Press articles highlighting my time spent in China and compiled video footage for the Gilman team to edit and produce. My articles and videos were an important part of my daily routine, and I gained a deeper understanding while observing cultural differences. The position allowed me to reflect on my time spent in China, encouraged others to someday be in my shoes, and served as the best medium to remember my memories. I collaborated with two fantastic people from IIE that guided me in my project and trusted my creative instincts with my work. I was chosen for a once in a lifetime scholarship and volunteer position and the experience opened up doors for me when I returned back to the states.

My experience abroad and volunteer work as a Gilman Global Experience Blog Correspondent sparked an interest in journalism and social media. I even switched my emphasis to Marketing because of my new-found passion for it. I started

volunteering at the Columbia Area Career Center where I gained hands-on marketing experience and now work for them as their Social Media Manager. While I enjoyed my new role as a Social Media Manager, I wanted to give back to my community even further. I wanted to share my experience with the freshmen students at Mizzou so I compiled a Prezi presentation, study abroad reference sheet, and reached out to students via Twitter and email.

***"My experience abroad and volunteer work as a video blog correspondent sparked an interest in journalism and social media. I even switched my emphasis to Marketing because of my new-found passion for it."***

My continued service to the Gilman Scholarship will never go away and I look forward to promoting the Gilman Scholarship to future study abroad students. I not only became a more well-rounded individual, but I improved my language skills and enhanced my education outside the classroom. Without the Gilman Scholarship I would not be as successful as I am today and for that, I thank you.

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

During my term abroad I was a Gilman Global Experience Blog Correspondent for the Gilman Program. In this role, I documented my experience and encouraged students to consider international

exchange to become part of their college experience. Upon returning to the states, I wanted to give back as much as possible. On campus, I was heavily involved with Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs), which are social and

academic peer groups designed exclusively for incoming college freshmen. For the program, I taught a semester FIG course on Study Abroad. In addition, I gave presentations to other FIG classes on the top reasons to study abroad.

## HUGO HERNANDEZ, JAPAN, 2014

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Nevada

BENJAMIN A.

GILMAN

INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



**S**tudying abroad in Japan had a profound effect on both my personal and professional goals. I have always wanted to pursue a career in international law, but my experience abroad helped reinforce my desires to pursue this field of work. I was able to see international law from a different point of view and this helped deepen my interest in the international field. My time away from home helped me mature as an individual, become more independent, and gain skills necessary in this globally connected world.

I took an intensive Japanese language studies program at Kwansai Gakuin University (KGU) in Japan in order to improve my Japanese. During my time abroad, I stayed with a host family of three and this experience helped my language acquisition as well. None of the family members spoke much English so I was compelled to speak

Japanese on a daily basis. While difficult at first, I was able to quickly adapt and learn at a much faster rate. My host parents were always understanding and helped me acclimate to the change in language. This immersion into Japanese society allowed me to really experience what life in another country is like. I was a Japanese resident instead of a tourist.

Seeing the world has always been a personal goal of mine. I enjoy learning about different cultures and trying new things. My time in Japan allowed me to experience the Japanese culture first-hand, in a way that I could not have done living in the United States. Not only was I able to further my language studies, but I also learned a lot more about the Japanese culture, history and lifestyle. I was able to join clubs at the host university and really interact with other students my age.

My experience abroad has given me more than just memories. I was able to make long-lasting connections with individuals from all over the world. In addition to this, my experience makes me more competitive when applying for law school and employment in the future. Only a small percentage of U.S. undergraduate students study abroad so this made me stand out from the rest applying to law school.

Studying abroad has helped me grow in a multitude of ways. Spending four months in a completely different country helped push me outside of my comfort zone and helped me grow. Now that I look back at this experience, I notice all of the little changes that it caused within me. I learned, matured, and saw another part of the world.

There is so much knowledge outside of the United States that not a lot of individuals are able to obtain. Studying abroad is more than a trip to another country, it is creating a home away from home. Take the chance and see what you are able to find.

***“I was able to see international law from a different point of view and this helped deepen my interest in the international field.”***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

My Follow-on Service Project consisted of giving presentations to students in which I shared my experiences abroad and provided information on the Gilman Scholarship. I presented to students at my old high school and students at my university in order to have a greater

impact. I worked with the International Programs office at my university in order to increase my audience within my university campus. Through them, I was able to present to diverse individuals both in English and in Spanish. At the end of each presentation I would provide my

email and offer to serve as a point of contact for any questions or concerns. I was fortunate enough to receive help and advice from those around me when I was preparing to study abroad, so I made it a personal goal to create a difference in the studies of others.

## GREGORY JONES, TANZANIA, 2012

University of Pittsburgh  
Connecticut



I can confidently say my study abroad experience was truly unique, and unlike any other. By making the choice to spend my last year as an undergraduate in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, I knew I was making a decision that would have a significant impact on my life.

Academically, my experience allowed me to interpret, analyze, and understand Tanzania's educational system. Studying at the University of Dar es Salaam, I witnessed the differences in educational opportunity, which in turn helped me understand the country's history and view of academia.

Professionally, my questions about joining the Foreign Service and/or working in international affairs were answered. I was fortunate enough to work with a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the country and felt this shaped my career goals. I interned with an outstanding NGO called Wonder Workshop where for ten months, I taught English as a Second Language (ESL) to artisans living with physical deformities from polio.

Through my experience teaching ESL, I felt connected to the local community in Tanzania and I developed genuine friendships with many of the employees at Wonder Workshop. The beauty of those relationships is that we taught each other. The experience helped me realize how important it is to continue giving back to the community in which you live and it is on that path that I intend to remain professionally.

While living in Tanzania, I was lucky to befriend some of the most loving, jovial, and resilient people I have ever met. I formed genuine relationships with many of them. The friendships I formed, the conversations I had, and my love for human connection is what I will take away most from this experience. I will continue to value

these connections anywhere I go.

I am currently the program coordinator with the organization Refugee and Immigrant Fund (RiF) in New York City, aiding asylum seekers in the acculturation process through urban farming. I hope to continue serving communities in a similar respect and look forward to future opportunities.

I have always been in firm support of working within the community in which you live. Studying and interning in Tanzania reaffirmed that belief and inspired me to continue working with disadvantaged populations from both a local and global perspective. Studying abroad in Tanzania has inspired me to continue to understand the world.

***"The friendships I formed, the conversations I had, and my love for human connection is what I will take away most from this experience and is something I will continue to value anywhere I go."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I returned to Pittsburgh where I attended college to present to the Somali-Bantu refugee youth affiliated with my organization, Keep It Real's, REAL Saturdays program. About fifteen to twenty students were in attendance, all of whom I worked

with for almost five years while attending college. I compiled a slide presentation, highlighting several high school study abroad programs that I found to be the most appropriate. I considered cost, scholarship and financial aid opportunities, location, duration of the trip, and academic

programming. I also talked extensively about my own study abroad experience. Many students said they benefited greatly from hearing about my experience. I am hoping to have inspired my students to pursue study abroad opportunities with this newly acquired knowledge.

## MICHAEL KARAKASH, CHILE, 2012

University of California, Irvine  
California



**G**rowing up in a multilingual household with a fusion of Armenian and Turkish culture and traditions has greatly impacted my worldview. My experiences growing up have nurtured my passion for travel and languages. I am extremely fortunate that the Gilman International Scholarship Program provided me with the resources and support I needed to pursue my interests in language and social justice through my study abroad experience in Santiago, Chile.

I knew the program in Chile was the perfect fit for me because it not only allowed me to take classes with local Chilean college students at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, but also provided me with the

opportunity to pursue my love for education and teach English. As a literary journalism student concentrating on racial theory and social justice, I focused my studies in Chile on photojournalism and documentary production in order to document the life and culture of the Chilean population and be a voice for underrepresented communities. The opportunity I had to work with Chilean photographers and filmmakers, while learning about the rich history and current social issues was a life-changing experience.

In Santiago, I jumped on any opportunity that would allow me to enhance my cultural understanding and improve my Spanish language skills. I taught English at a Chilean high school, as well as at the University of Santiago, Chile. Through my experience teaching at the University of Santiago I helped professional engineers improve their English communication skills allowing them to expand their careers globally. Not only did this allow me to better understand the educational climate in Chile, but it also connected me with people of all ages and challenged me to step outside my comfort zone.

Santiago is a beautiful city full of great food, art, literature, and music that changed my life. Upon the completion of my program, I came back to the U.S. to finish my degree, and immediately went back to Chile for another year to live in the city and teach English full-time.

I am currently working for an educational non-profit in Los Angeles, focusing on communities of color, and planning for a master's degree in international relations with a focus on Latin American development. Thanks to the Gilman Scholarship Program I had the opportunity to travel throughout South America. I can now say that I really understand what I want to do with my life.

***"The Gilman International Scholarship Program provided me with the resources and support I needed to pursue my interests in language and social justice."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I worked with an international non-profit, *Reach the World* (RTW). As a RTW correspondent, I shared my experiences while in Chile with a classroom of 6th and 7th grade students at a dual language school in South Bronx, New York.

I documented, wrote, blogged, and held international video conferences with these students, helping them connect to Chile and a world outside of their classroom, while coordinating lessons plans with their teacher.

The on-going connection we had throughout the year influenced their learning and showed them that there is an entire world outside of their city that they can go out and explore with the help of programs like the Gilman International Scholarship Program.

## AMANDA LAWNICKI, RUSSIA, 2012

Beloit College  
Michigan



**M**y experience in Moscow impacted me in uncountable ways. I studied Russian as a Foreign Language at the Russian State University for the Humanities (RGGU). My Russian skills improved greatly, I made several professional and personal connections with both Russians and non-Russians, and I had my first experience conducting on-site research at Park Iskustv (Fallen Monument Park).

The Gilman Program put me in contact with EducationUSA, so I had the opportunity to work with Russian high school students applying to U.S. colleges. Not only did I correct application essays, but I also gave a presentation on liberal arts institutions and even attended cultural events hosted at the center. I remember when I first came to the office, I was

forty minutes late because I got myself lost—a normal occurrence in Moscow. It didn't matter though, as the directors at the center, hugged me, immediately nicknamed me "Amandochka," sat me down, and gave a cup of tea.

I was later reminded of *American* hospitality when I was invited to the U.S. Embassy for a Thanksgiving dinner put on for U.S.-Russian exchange partners. I again got slightly lost and arrived a little late, but it also did not matter. I was hugged by people I had never met and who smiled a lot. After all, by then I had been used to the stony faces on the metro and in the grocery store, so the fact that everyone was smiling was strange!

These two instances highlight why I am so grateful to programs such as the Gilman Scholarship, that bring people from around the world together. Whether I was meeting my Russian colleagues or American ones, the reactions were amazingly similar. Not only was I able to learn about how Russian culture differs from my own, but also how we are similar in some of the most basic ways. And this was in Russia! Not too long ago, and perhaps even today, Russians and Americans were portrayed as complete opposites.

Of course, there were also instances that highlighted our differences—for example any attempt to form a line at the metro ticket booth was laughable. And the inventive shopping carts on swivel wheels facilitated the best organized chaos I had ever seen.

But my most memorable experience was quite ordinary, and occurred while waiting in the metro. An older man asked me a question I could not answer and he eventually found out I was American. He smiled, thanked me for coming to Russia, and made sure I got on the train before him.

*"I am so grateful to programs such as the Gilman Scholarship, that bring people from around the world together."*

I want to continue to facilitate these experiences that promote cross-cultural understanding, for myself and for others. The Gilman Program was a fantastic starting point, and I'll be eternally grateful for the opportunities the program gave me.

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I gave a symposium at Beloit College's annual "International Student Symposium Day," that incorporated my research on Park Iskustv in Moscow with independent research on post-Soviet memorials in Eastern Europe.

I was also a member and mentor for Student Support Services (SSS) and participated in a study abroad panel discussion for SSS and McNair Scholars students. These programs are part of the Federal TRiO Programs, which target students with high financial need, as well as first generation college students, ethnic

minorities, and students with disabilities. These same populations that are underrepresented in education abroad, and so we were able to tackle some fears and doubts specific to students like us. The ultimate message? You, too, CAN study abroad!

## AARON LEMMON, AUSTRALIA, 2007

Boston College  
Pennsylvania



**T**he Gilman Scholarship provided me an extraordinary opportunity to study in Western Australia during the spring 2007 semester at Murdoch University. Going abroad has had a significant impact on my personal life and my professional career opportunities. My study abroad experience encouraged me to expand my horizons in ways that I could have never previously imagined.

Murdoch University appealed to me because of the cultural opportunities available in the city of Perth in addition to the ways in which I could challenge myself academically. At the time that I studied abroad, I attended Boston College with majors in Communication and Theology. Murdoch University offered unique

course offerings to a student with my liberal arts background. I was attracted to Murdoch's theology immersion program which offered high-level courses with graduate Ph.D. and chaplaincy candidates.

My own interest in spirituality is deeply rooted in the historical perspective and my coursework reflected a challenging combination of curricula that I could not have pursued at Boston College. In particular, the writing analysis strategies coursework proved invaluable for my later work as a news writer, educational consultant, and health care administrator where effective communication can mean the difference between success and failure. I was inspired by the challenging coursework abroad, and thrived in the environment by earning top marks before I returned to Boston College to graduate cum laude.

Studying abroad in Australia is a much more diverse experience than many people might think at first glance – a large percentage of Murdoch University's student body had an international background, with strong representation from South Asia and Southeast Asia. One of the most memorable events I participated in

was a ten-day Northwest excursion up the Australia coast and through the Outback. This experience included lessons on the geology and history of Western Australia as well as opportunities to meet Aborigines who preserved tribal myths passed down across 40,000 of years of rich cultural tradition.

***"The writing analysis strategies coursework proved invaluable for my later work as a news writer, educational consultant, and health care administrator where effective communication can mean the difference between success and failure."***

These lessons in new cultures and health care approaches deeply informed my more recent work on behalf of Steward Health Care, the second largest hospital system in New England. To this day, I still wear a tiger eye gemstone ring – I acquired the stone during my Northwest trip and bound it with silver after my return to ensure I carry my Gilman legacy with me always.

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project I wanted to incorporate my Communication studies at Boston College in to my representation of study abroad and the Gilman Scholarship, so I decided to turn the pictures and memories of my ten-day

Northwest Field Trip Excursion into a video documentary DVD. I perfected my skills with Final Cut Pro and the final product was presented at Boston College as well as broadcast on the local Fox affiliate in my hometown. It was exciting to

have this footage used for outreach efforts. I am honored to serve as a Gilman Alumni Ambassador with the opportunity to spread the word myself!

## LEA-JEANNE MARTIN, UNITED KINGDOM, 2014

The Evergreen State College  
Washington

BENJAMIN A.

GILMAN

INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



**T**he impact of being awarded the Gilman Scholarship to study abroad in Scotland has been incredibly impactful and empowering both as a student and as an individual. Living abroad affords both personal and scholastic growth. Choosing to enhance my social psychology studies at the University of Stirling was incredible. The Psychology program at the University of Stirling is one of the highest rated in student satisfaction in all of the United Kingdom because it incorporates challenging individual student-led research in addition to classroom lecture in the learning environment.

I learned that Scotland's understanding of education is not a lecture being given to a class, but presenting a scenario that encourages

individual perspectives to contribute to an overall understanding on what is being taught. Often, a single discussion topic could last for weeks because of all the different perspectives from students in the classroom. I also enjoyed that I was learning all the time, not just from the professors in my lecture classes, but from students on campus, from gym teachers, the help desk, the janitor, even the resident coordinator. Additionally, all of my classes were hybrid - class time followed by field instruction. The field studies to allow students to see and test theories in an active, hands-on environment.

For example, my favorite part of a class I took, Psychology of Evil, was discussing William Wallace, hearing heated and passionate lectures from our teachers on how Mel Gibson actually did an inaccurate job on the movie *Braveheart*. Reading and hearing about William Wallace (*Braveheart*) was exciting - taking an actual field trip and planting your feet on the land where he fought, feeling the chilly temperatures to have an understanding of their survival, and having the knowledge of why this particular battle is such a proud and concreted moment in Scotland's culture is quite different.

As Scotland is rich with history, my time immersing myself in the people and culture has allowed me to create my own personal chapter of a family history. My children are of mixed heritage - half African-American, half Scottish. Their grandmother is the only surviving relative they know that originated from Scotland and sadly, her failing health means what little my children know of their Scottish roots passes with her. The award of the Gilman Scholarship placed me in an otherwise unobtainable position to be in the heart of their beginnings, searching and connecting numerous amounts of information such as their originating clan's history, their tartan (the skirts) colors, and the clan's Scottish crest to bring information back to them. Now they have an opportunity to pass down their full culture from both sides if they chose to have a family in the future. ,

***“As Scotland is rich with history, my time immersing myself in the people and culture has allowed me to create my own personal chapter of a family history.”***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I created a blog documenting my experiences in Scotland that included writing, pictures, and video for others at my home university that are considering study abroad. Additionally, I am scheduled to speak in lectures at my home university

about my study abroad experiences. In addressing the non-traditional student population at my university, I feel that I am able to identify several perceptions of barriers that allow those who are unsure to move forward. My hope is to be able to identify and speak about the barriers

from my first-hand experience so that I can offer potential study abroad students ways to overcome their own challenges. I am excited to share my experiences and provide any insight to allow others to facilitate their own experience as well.

## DONALD MEEKS, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2014

Scottsdale Community College  
Arizona



**M**y dream is to become a global citizen, and with the help of the Gilman Scholarship Program, I am one step closer to realizing that dream. As a Gilman Scholarship recipient I was provided the opportunity to study cinema in the beautiful city of Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic.

I spent the summer of 2014 studying the influence of cinema during both Czech Republic Revolutions. I was thrilled to learn about the power of a craft that I have studied for years, and how it fueled change on such a grand scale during the revolutionary times.

The program that I participated in allowed for immersion into the Czech culture. The flexibility and expertise of the staff helped me and my fellow students to dive deep into the culture of the Czech Republic. We rode public transportation and shopped in local supermarkets.

My dream and current studies to become a travel media specialist was affirmed on this trip. I had a chance to witness the amazing art in all mediums while abroad. The very buildings we lived in remained pretty much unchanged through both occupations. With a classroom located directly in Praha city square, it was impossible to miss the everyday life and wonder of the Czech culture. My documentary film work, as well my photography skills, allowed me to shine light into the little known past of the Czech Republic.

I was able to learn greatly from the fellow students on the program who were studying topics such as Art History and Holocaust Studies. I visited the Jewish quarter as well as the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe. Being able visit these

historical sites intensified the empathy I felt for their past struggles and helped me understand the history much more than just through reading and lectures.

My experience abroad helped to open my mind to new opportunities and gave me an understanding of cultural differences, as well as a great respect for the Czech culture.

Upon returning home, I enrolled at Arizona State for a Bachelors in Arts in Digital Culture and am planning a minor in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Through this program and background, I hope to have the opportunity to study abroad again or work abroad in the future.

***"I was thrilled to learn about the power of a craft that I have studied for years, and how it fueled change on such a grand scale during the revolutionary times."***

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I was excited to incorporate aspects of the digital and still art that I studied and worked on while abroad in to my presentations and discussions with potential study abroad students. I am working on a photobook to donate to the study abroad office so that other students

can teleport into my past and witness the beauty of the Czech Republic.

In addition, I am planning on creating and showing a promotional video at my community's annual Film School Film Festival. This will allow potential students, as well as

their parents and family members, to start the conversation about study abroad. In both the photobook and the video, I am hoping students will enjoy imagery from an actual scholar's adventure!

## ERIKA MORTON, CHINA, 2014

University of Memphis  
Georgia

BENJAMIN A.

GILMAN

INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



Interning abroad was a life-changing experience; I had the opportunity to network with successful individuals and I was able to explore many places throughout China. On a personal level, traveling and living abroad completely opened my eyes to other ways of life. Taking myself away from the norms that I was used to and immersing myself in a country where things were done differently really put my adaptability to the test.

I interned at Helena Forbes, a fabric outsourcing company. I had the opportunity to source fabric for some of the world's leading clothing companies. This opportunity definitely went hand-in-hand with my field of study. Many of Helena Forbes' clients are based all over the world. I was able to get a first hand

view of how business is conducted on an international level. While interning, I learned that business customs vary from country to country, so conducting research on business behavior is extremely important in order to be successful. I had the opportunity to speak with five successful CEOs all under the age of thirty who run business ventures in China. Each of them told me that research counts.

While I was in China, I had to test my level of independence and my social skills. Before arriving in China, I knew very little Mandarin. It was not enough to hold even a basic conversation. I had to learn a few simple sentences fast. With English as a primary language and Spanish as a secondary language, learning Mandarin was a bit challenging. At times, it became frustrating, but after a while, it all came together. The majority of the time I commuted around the city by myself, and knowing Mandarin was essential. At first, I was shy about speaking with others in Mandarin, but eventually with practice I had gained enough confidence to speak comfortably.

During my time abroad, I met so many goal-driven individuals who have taught themselves how to do whatever they put their minds to. I was able to engage in motivating and educational conversations on a consistent basis. Those conversations have pushed me to take pride in everything that I do, definitely when it comes down to conducting research and my education.

Overall, this experience has given me a whole new perspective upon life. Spending my summer nearly ten thousand miles away around the globe was incredible. I am extremely thankful for this opportunity and will encourage others to take the steps to turn the idea of studying or interning abroad into a reality.

***"While interning, I learned that business customs vary from country to country, so conducting research on business behavior is extremely important in order to be successful."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

I was able to incorporate my hobby of video production into my Follow-on Service Project by creating a video blog highlighting my experience abroad for everyone to view online. Parts of the video blog are also embedded into my presentation as a tool to engage the

viewers. I have set up dates to present my experience to K-12 students with an emphasis on juniors and seniors. I believe that because they are graduating soon, the thought of studying abroad will be fresh in their minds. I have also presented at my school's annual

study abroad fair. Realizing that International Business majors are underrepresented, I am spreading awareness about interning abroad throughout the International Business Student organization on campus.

## BEN NIA, AUSTRALIA, 2013

University of Texas, Austin  
Texas



**G**rowing up, I always seized any opportunity to go abroad and enrich my life with new people and new places. However after some time, I wanted something more than just two or three weeks in a different country as a tourist. I wanted to completely immerse myself into another culture. Thus, it was no surprise that around my sophomore year at the University of Texas at Austin I decided to study abroad for a semester.

My semester abroad impacted me academically in ways that I would have never imagined. As an exchange student at the University of Sydney in Australia, I had the opportunity to enroll in a bioethics class, which eventually became my favorite

undergraduate course. I became so engrossed in the subject matter that I shifted my professional goals to reflect a career that encompasses the ethical issues involving medicine. I also had the privilege of attending a lecture at the University of Sydney, where the 14th Dalai Lama shared his views on education. Such a poignant presentation was truly an amazing and once in a lifetime experience. In addition, I participated as a test subject for a clinical experiment at my school's biochemistry department. It was fascinating to be on the other side of the research spectrum and I know the knowledge I gained will be invaluable to me as a future physician.

Additionally, while abroad I had the privilege of befriending students from all over the world. Throughout the semester, I grew close with them and fostered bonds that would last even though we would soon be hundreds of miles apart.

After applying to study at the University of Sydney in Australia, it was important to start thinking of ways I was going to fund such an endeavor. My study abroad advisor suggested I apply for the Gilman Scholarship, which I am so grateful that I did. Receiving the Gilman Scholarship allowed me to opt out of

taking additional loans in order to go abroad.

Studying abroad in Australia was one of the most eye-opening experiences I participated in while in college. Spring of 2013 was truly an unforgettable semester. My experiences abroad shaped my academic, personal, and professional goals so much that I cannot imagine where I would be now if I had not gone abroad. Although I am back in the U.S., I know this is only the beginning of my international education endeavors. I am so thankful towards the U.S. Department of State, the Gilman Program, and the Institute of International Education for giving me the means to participate in such a profound program that changed my perception of who I am and what I want to accomplish in life.

***"My experiences abroad shaped my academic, personal, and professional goals so much that I cannot imagine where I would be now if I had not gone abroad."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

After returning from Australia, I fulfilled my Follow-on Service Project by informing students at my home university about the Gilman International Scholarship Program.

I also worked closely with the Cockrell School of Engineering, the Foreign Language Department, and

the social fraternity, Tejas, at the University of Texas, in order to raise awareness that students can study abroad while finishing their degree in four years.

Working with potential study abroad applicants has been a great way for me to inform students that study

abroad can be affordable with the aid of scholarships, such as the Gilman Scholarship. This cooperative approach helped double the number of applicants who applied for the Gilman Scholarship at The University of Texas.

## ROSA REYES, FRANCE, 2012

University of New Mexico  
New Mexico



**S**tudying abroad has been the most challenging, yet the most rewarding and beautiful experience of my life. I studied abroad in Nice, France for one academic year. I chose this location because I wanted to learn French as a third language. Obtaining a Gilman Scholarship was of such significance for me because it gave me an opportunity I would have never had; studying abroad is a challenge for students with limited financial means.

While abroad, I lived with a French roommate, who became a really good friend. Through conversations with her, my French language abilities

improved immensely. The second semester, I lived with a host mom, which further advanced my French conversational skills. Even though she spoke English, she only spoke to me in French. Although it was frustrating at times, it was such great experience for my improvement in the language. Also, I created a “conversation partner” group with my neighbor, and took extra classes at the Alliance Française to further aid in my language proficiency.

In the nine months I spent abroad, I learned more about my goals and myself than in any of other undergraduate experience. My growth from studying abroad has meant so much to me and has been applicable to my everyday endeavors ever since. Personally, this was a time of re-discovering my identity, developing adaptability and independence, understanding the value of human relationships, becoming a better friend, and even learning to laugh at myself. However, this was also a time to define my academic and career path.

Upon my return from abroad, I continue to take French classes with

the goal of eventually becoming fluent in three languages. This skill is crucially important to me because of my career goals. In the future I want to work with international communities on issues of human rights and social justice, such as with refugee agencies and/or departments, whether in the United States, abroad, or internationally. My dream work place would be the United Nations.

*“In the nine months I spent abroad, I learned more about my goals and myself than in any of other undergraduate experience.”*

After graduation, my next step is to apply to a graduate program in International Family Studies or International Organizations. Taking this direction, would allow me to combine my passions - family dynamics, language learning, international affairs and traveling - into my career path.

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

As part of my Follow-on Service Project, I wrote monthly articles for the newsletter of the Student Support Services (SSS) TRiO Program at my home university, for which I worked as a tutor and mentor prior to my departure. The articles I wrote were about my process as a Gilman applicant, my experiences, my host university, learning a new language, the culture, and most importantly,

financial resources and scholarships such as Gilman, and the benefits of studying abroad. TRiO’s mission is to support first-generation, low-income, and minority students through services such as academic and financial aid advising tutoring and mentoring, social/cultural activities, and graduate school guidance. I chose this program because of its genuine commitment to the students and

because these newsletters reach more than 100 students per month. There is an urgent need to promote study abroad programs within minority students since the percentages of these students studying abroad at the University of New Mexico are as low as 10%, being that it is a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

## HEATHER STEWART, COSTA RICA, 2013

University of Louisville  
Kentucky



In the Summer of 2013, I had the unique and unforgettable experience of studying abroad in the beautiful country of Costa Rica. Thanks to the Gilman Scholarship, I was able to realize my desire to pursue an international learning experience, and actualize my dream of attending a university outside of the United States. My experience was more rewarding than I could ever express in words. I truly was able to grow as a person through my new experiences, as I stepped outside of my comfort zone and embraced a new culture, tried new things, and immersed myself into a new way of life.

During my time abroad, I lived in a

homestay with a local family and two other American students. Living with a local family was the best way to truly immerse myself in the culture: they treated each of us like daughters and made us feel right at home. We had home-cooked traditional meals every day and had a family to show us around San Jose. It was also an important part of my language acquisition, as I had the opportunity to practice Spanish with native speakers in my homestay.

In Costa Rica, I studied at Universidad Veritas. While there, I took two courses: "Costa Rican Health Care and Tropical Medicine" and "Spanish for Health Care Professionals." These were perfect courses for me, and the availability of these courses was the primary reason that I selected my particular study abroad program. Here in the States, I am a Senior Biology and Philosophy double major, with interest in Bioethics. Upon graduation, I plan to attend graduate school to obtain a Masters degree in Bioethics and Medical Humanities, and then possibly pursue a J.D. with a concentration in Health Care Law or a Ph.D. in Bioethics. I would like to do clinical ethics, advise hospital policy, and eventually work on developing health care policy at the government level.

During my time abroad, I was able to focus on how the health care system of Costa Rica functions, including visiting hospitals and other sites of health care practice. It was a very eye opening experience that will continue to influence my perspective on the health care system here in the U.S. As I begin my path towards graduate studies and eventually my career, I will remember what I learned, as well as the general importance of a global perspective on health.

Most importantly, I developed a deep love and respect for another country and the people that live there during my summer abroad. I expanded my horizons and embraced a new culture, in a way that has changed me indefinitely. I will always be thankful to the U.S. Department of State and the Gilman Scholarship for the amazing opportunities they provide to students like myself. Pura Vida!

*"As I begin my path towards graduate studies and eventually my career, I will remember what I learned, as well as the general importance of a global perspective on health."*

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

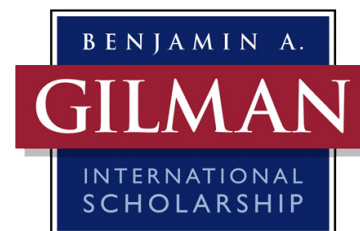
An important part of my Follow-on Service Project was taking a road trip back to the high school that I graduated from to present to the students there and to get them thinking about study abroad. The kids that I reached out to were students likely to be first generation college

students, or students that come from backgrounds where they might not talk about college or opportunities such as study abroad with their families. It meant a lot to me to be able to be a living example of someone who came from the exact same background as they did. I

expressed the importance of thinking about study abroad early, to be able to take advantage of great scholarship and grant opportunities that can fund study abroad, and reassured them that study abroad is (and should be) for everyone.

## JOVONA TAYLOR, UNITED KINGDOM, 2013

University of Missouri  
Illinois



**T**hanks to the Gilman Scholarship I was able to study and intern in London, England for a semester during my junior year of college. This opportunity has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my life thus far. I was able to immerse myself in a culture totally different from my background and gained so many valuable friendships, life lessons and professional advancements. As a first-generation college student who saw no possibilities of studying abroad prior to learning of the Gilman Scholarship, I am passionate about promoting study abroad experiences for others like myself.

While studying in London, I took classes related to British culture and my academic major of journalism. Many of my classes implemented aspects of the vibrant city and allowed for a very interactive learning environment. My classes included visits to various U.K. media companies like The Guardian, Bloomberg and Condé Nast and others unique to British culture and media. I also completed an internship for media company Dennis Publishing while abroad. My internship allowed me to experience a British work environment on a weekly basis and to make connections with professional journalists. My international internship also helped me to expand my writing and reporting style in order to reach a broad readership beyond the United States.

My time abroad was a personal learning experience that made me a lot more conscious about the world and its diverse range of cultures and people. I lived in a flat (commonly known as an apartment in the U.S.) with other American students in the London borough of

Camden. I rode the tube everyday to get to class and my internship. I took advantage of the various markets throughout the city to shop for everything from clothes to fresh produce. Ultimately, I had no choice but to be overwhelmed with British life and culture during my time abroad, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Studying abroad gave me the opportunity to experience a world much bigger than I imagined as a young adult. I can honestly say that I am more culturally aware and mentally enriched, because I lived and studied in London for four months of my life.

***“My time abroad was a personal learning experience that made me a lot more conscious about the world and its diverse range of cultures and people.”***

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project I wanted to target high school-level students from the inner-city of Chicago, where I am from, and inspire them to consider studying abroad.

I presented to a class of junior and senior-level students at a neighborhood high school about my experience abroad and gave them advice on how to jump start their own study abroad experience before heading to college. My goal

was to show young students that despite the misconceptions associated with studying abroad, I am living proof that it is possible for students of all backgrounds and lifestyles.

## RAUL VELARDE, SPAIN, 2012

University of Miami  
Florida



I have loved the city and the University of Miami, since I moved from Quito, Ecuador 14 years ago. I have cherished each moment in Miami and would not trade my experience or education there for anything. I state this because with all that attachment; leaving for a semester and imbedding myself in a country I have never been in, away from everyone I know, has been the most rewarding six months in my life. I learned so much about cultures, language, professionalism, travel, and even resilience during my time abroad.

I have always had a deep international connection due to my international background. I live in one of the most

diverse cities in the United States, speak multiple languages, and work for an engineering firm with offices around the world, but studying in Santander truly showed me what having an internationally informed mindset truly is.

Meeting students that were studying abroad from approximately 20 different countries, all with outstanding backgrounds and unique stories to tell highlighted my time in Spain. I was one of the few in the engineering program. The university's civil engineering department is one of the best in Spain, hence the most competitive to get into. Due to some classes being cancelled, I was even able to take a Coastal Engineering course in a city renowned for their oceanic protection. The class was a great challenge that I was able to overcome. I even made it to the top of the class. In addition to my technical courses, I was also able to take a pre-historic art course to learn more about the history of the region and development.

Furthermore, by being so close to historically rich cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville, I was able to learn not just about the culture of the region I was in, but the country of

Spain. My time in Europe gave me the experience to converse about the day-to-day lifestyle, art, history, and gastronomy.

Once I came back to the United States, I was able to use what I learned abroad in the business world. With many businessmen traveling around the world, I was able to have a thought provoking conversations with people much older than me and build business relationships in the industry. During interviews, my study abroad experience is always a conversation starter and seen as a sign of leadership and diversity.

***"During interviews, my study abroad experience is always a conversation starter and seen as a sign of leadership and diversity."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

My Follow-On Service Project was based on helping the study abroad program at the University of Miami grow along with its relationship with the students that come from partner schools. By being a Global Ambassador with the Study Abroad department, I was able to provide my input during orientation and interest

meetings we put together for prospective study abroad students. In these sessions, the study abroad alumni were able to share their experience with the younger students and provide advice on how to proceed. In addition to that, due to the low number of engineering students that study abroad, I became

an advisor for the College of Engineering and helped students plan their academic curriculum, prepare their study and intern abroad applications and advise them on financial aid opportunities such as the Gilman Scholarship.

# QUENTON WHITE, UNITED KINGDOM, 2013

Wayne State University  
Michigan

BENJAMIN A.  
**GILMAN**  
INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



**T**hanks to the help of the Gilman Scholarship Program, the U.S. Department of State, as well as the Shawn Carter Foundation, I was able to spend a semester in Manchester, England where I studied sociology and criminal justice to prepare for law school.

I initially chose to study in the United Kingdom to strengthen my understanding of legal systems here in the U.S, as our system is largely based on British law, but I was surprised to have learned of Manchester's rich and interesting history. For instance, it is where Ernest Rutherford successfully split the atom for the first time. It is also

home to the first modern light rail system, two major accomplishments in the world of technology and sciences.

I had the opportunity to meet people from different nationalities and cultures. This helped me decide which language I wanted to study for my home institution's language requirement. I eventually settled on Italian after making friends with several Italian speaking students and natives throughout my time abroad.

I wanted to become more involved in the community on a personal level and contribute my time positively while living in Manchester, so I volunteered with the U.K. Cancer Research program. As a volunteer, I attended local events to raise awareness about the causes, prevention and treatments of cancer.

My abroad experienced has led me to consider studying abroad again, only this time I would like to live in Italy to study Italian. My university has a program based in the beautiful L'aquila region of Abruzzo. I think

this would be a great opportunity to become immersed in the culture and thoroughly understand the language.

Overall, the experience was really worthwhile. I made new friends, explored different cultures and completed classes that have enhanced my understanding of our legal system here in the U.S.

*"I wanted to become more involved in the community on a personal level and contribute my time positively while living in Manchester."*

Currently, I am completing my senior year and working for Google's Community Leadership program, a one-year program designed to promote digital literacy in underserved communities and small businesses.

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

After learning of the Follow-on Service Project requirement, I thought of ways I could make a positive impact on Detroit through my service proposal and by utilizing things I would learn while abroad.

I considered two major issues facing the city, economic recovery and redevelopment within the city. Entrepreneurship and urban development have been major topics

around the city. My Follow-on Service Project, ExtraPUSH was designed to aid this agenda through social entrepreneurship and community involvement.

The organization provides a platform for aspiring and existing entrepreneurs to launch or accelerate their social venture or organization. We do this by connecting entrepreneurs with local

mentors, resources and provide them with guidance on business planning. I believe such programs are crucial to the city's revitalization process, and to encourage growth in Detroit. I received support from my university, as well as the U.S. Department of State who has helped me expand the idea and fundraise for the project.

## CALVIN XU, GERMANY, 2008

New York Institute of Technology  
New York

BENJAMIN A.  
**GILMAN**  
INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOLARSHIP



**A**s someone who has never ventured far outside of New York City, the opportunity to spend a year abroad in Germany was truly a life-changing experience. This was made possible by the Gilman Scholarship and through the Congress Bundestag for Youth Exchange program (CBYX).

I lived with an amazing German host family who I still maintain contact with to the present day. I spent the first two months learning German at a intensive

language school called the Carl Duisberg Centrum in Cologne. Afterwards, I was placed at the University of Applied Bremen where I took a full semester of electrical engineering courses in German and English. In the last six months of the program, I worked as a corporate business development intern at the Kaefer Gruppe—a midsize industrial insulation firm headquartered in Bremen.

Overall, my time in Germany was as comprehensive as it can be. I had the chance to live, work and study in the country for a year and met countless professional contacts and friends along the way.

I was encouraged to seek out additional study abroad opportunities upon returning to my university. A year after the I received the Gilman Scholarship to study in Germany, I

participated in my university's first study abroad program to Nanjing, China for two semesters. I also went back to Germany again in the summer of 2010 for a research internship with the University of Hamburg. Now, I am working as a systems engineer for Alpine Partners—a proprietary trading firm that is headquartered in Manhattan and St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands.

***"I took a full semester of electrical engineering courses in German and English. In the last six months of the program, I worked as a corporate business development intern at the Kaefer Gruppe—a midsize industrial insulation firm headquartered in Bremen."***

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

Before I went abroad to Germany, I made a decision to blog as often as possible. I had a semi-professional DSLR camera and I loaded my blog with weekly content on how life is like living in Europe.

For the Follow-on Service Project, I worked closely with the study abroad center at my university in

spreading the word about the Gilman Scholarship and my experiences abroad. I hosted information sessions during break hours and after class hours using PowerPoint and showing my time in Europe through my blog and photography website.

Today, as an alumnus of my university, I feel that I have a greater role in advising incoming

and prospective students about the value of an international education. To that end, I will always refer students to apply for the Gilman Scholarship.