

# I AM A GILMAN SCHOLAR

## Dominic R.

As an introverted gay Latino man, I have always been wary of things new and unfamiliar to me. I think that's why I was so adamant about studying abroad in England, a place I had never visited but for which I felt nostalgia. From the classes I had taken on British literature, to my obsession with Harry Potter and Peter Pan as a child, I felt like I knew England, making it the perfect setting for me to push myself to try new things and test my boundaries.

I admit, I almost let my anxiety get the better of me. I was scared to be "too gay" or "too Latino" for England – my intersectional identity is so underrepresented in media that it was almost impossible to imagine myself anywhere other than the town where I grew up. I did some research, and that's how I ended up at the University of Sussex in the summer of 2019.

Did you know Brighton – where the university is located – is known as the unofficial gay capital of the U.K.? I was lucky enough to be there to experience Pride for the first time, and the impact this had on me can't be overstated. It often feels like my intersectional gay Latino identity is at odds with itself. Culturally, traditional values, gender norms, and machismo make queer identity feel like something alien and poorly grafted onto Latinx identities. So to see an entire city erupt in celebration with parades, confetti, and music; queer people of color couples holding hands walking down streets and kissing their partners out in the open; the children of same-sex parents waving rainbow flags – it was epiphanic. I had never felt so validated and comfortable in my own skin amongst strangers being completely true to themselves. It felt like a warm embrace from the universe.

While studying abroad helped me on my journey to resolving this identity conflict, my time in England also reconnected me to my inner child! As an English major in England, I had a blast in my Children's Literature course. My favorite part was visiting the Making of Harry Potter studio tour. But my experience in England greatly influenced me academically as well. Today, I am writing an undergraduate thesis on teen sick-lit and one of the novels I'm focusing on is actually Peter Pan by J. M. Barrie. My Children's Literature course in England showed me that the stories we grow up with are often more than they seem, and although they're written for children, can spur strong discourse among adults.

Overall, my time in England opened me up to new possibilities and adventures. If I were to offer advice to those studying abroad in England, or anywhere really, it would be to go with the flow and find out where the tides of change take you. You're in for a pleasant surprise!

