

Sydney Kokinis

Gilman Program Alumni Ambassador
South Korea, 2022



“Studying abroad is not a “one-and-done” experience and continues to shape you! My time abroad not only opened opportunities for my academic and career paths, but aided in building the foundation of who I am today.”

Sydney studied abroad as a Gilman scholar during the fall of 2022 through the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) Arts and Sciences program at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea. Her time in South Korea taught her the value of communal living and adapting to the Korean way of life. She embraced cultural diversity and enjoyed celebrating cultural uniqueness with fellow international students from diverse backgrounds. She was challenged to reconsider her preconceived notions about individuality, collectivism, and the individualistic tendencies of the United States as she observed South Korea’s collective societal structure. She also was exposed to South Korean academics who inspired her academically and ignited a greater curiosity for global issues and international relations.

Sydney credits her Gilman Program experience with building her self-confidence and interest in other education systems. She also developed personal and professional connections, which aided in completing her senior thesis, *Constructing South Korean National Identity: A Historical Analysis of Cultural, Social, and Political Factors Shaping the Contemporary South Korean National Identity*. Sydney notes that studying abroad required a lot of self-trust and confidence as she navigated a completely new culture, environment, and language, but her confidence grew exponentially and followed her back to the United States. She became a “Returnee Expert” for the Overseas Study Abroad Office on her campus, where she spoke with students wanting to study abroad in South Korea.

Sydney recently graduated from Indiana University Bloomington. She is deciding whether to apply for a Fulbright U.S. Student Program Study/Research Award for Korea or pursue a career opportunity with the federal government. The Fulbright Program presents a unique chance to further engage in cultural exchange and conduct research abroad while a position with the federal government would provide an opportunity to serve the public and contribute to the nation’s development. In the meantime, Sydney is continuing to study Korean and wants to earn a Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) certificate from the South Korean government. She is excited to be a Gilman Alumni Ambassador and to provide a support system for Gilman applicants. She also is excited to advocate for study abroad in South Korea and spread the word that the Gilman Scholarship equals opportunity.

- Hometown: Fremont, Indiana
- Earned a Bachelor of Arts in international studies with concentrations in diplomacy, governance, and security, and in East Asian studies with a concentration in Korean from Indiana University Bloomington (2023)
- Was a “Returnee Expert” for the Overseas Study Abroad Office at Indiana University Bloomington

