



## Gilman Alumni Interview Transcript – Erica Swallow

My name is Erica Swallow. I'm from Arkansas and I go to New York University. I studied abroad in China and that was the year of 2006. My major field of study is International Business and Marketing with a concentration in East Asia Studies and Mandarin Chinese. While I was abroad in China, I studied mostly Chinese culture courses and that kind of fell into Chinese journalism. I took a class on comparative literature which compared Western and Chinese Literature and thought patterns. I also took, I am a business major and the only course that I took while abroad was Chinese Economics. I decided to apply for a Gilman because I knew 100% when I applied to college that I was going to study abroad. Unfortunately, I am from a low income family so I knew I was not going to be able to study abroad unless I had some sort of financial assistance. I basically went on a big run and started applying to every single scholarship in hope that one would come. I was staying with my grandparents in Ohio when I finally received the scholarship, which actually let me go abroad. So it was pretty intense and life changing actually - it was my first time abroad.

My Gilman experience was incredible. My favorite part was learning the language. I had learned a lot of romance languages, but I had never learned an Asian language before studying. Learning Mandarin was incredible because I basically needed to know what to eat. In my area where we were staying at in East China Normal University there aren't many English speaking people in general around the campus, so in order to order food you needed to know the language. It was pretty exciting. Just getting around in general - sometimes you hop in a taxi cab and you would need to know how to give directions in Mandarin, which was exciting and getting lost was also fun because you had to find yourself and find where you are going.

Secondly, I loved traveling around China because once you enter China as a student you can't actually exit on the student visa, so you are kind of trapped in China, which makes you want to travel all around. I went to some interesting rural areas and also to other major cities in China. I have never had the opportunity to centralize myself in one country and travel all around during my time there, so it was unique. It was a very unique experience.

Receiving the Gilman Scholarship made a huge impact on my life. After studying abroad I decided that I wanted to pursue working in China. So I'm a senior this year and decided that I'd like to do marketing abroad in China since that's my major. Actually, at the end of the semester I'm going to two different business conferences. I was just accepted into the Forum for American and Chinese Exchange at Stanford University, which is a collaborative forum that brings together American students and Chinese students to discuss all types of topics regarding American and Chinese

relations. I'm also going to the Wharton-UPenn China Business Conference this weekend. So, it really has made a big impact on my life. I also started studying Mandarin. I've taken it for two years now and I hope to go abroad this summer in China again, to study my third year of Mandarin after graduating. I hope to have a future in China after I graduate because finding a job is a little bit difficult at this time.

For my Follow-On Project, I partnered with the Chinese Humane Society, which is the largest Chinese culture club at New York University, to put on a cultural fashion show, which was actually a benefit show. All the proceeds went to an organization called China Care Foundation, which helps disabled Chinese orphans get life-saving surgeries. We actually helped two children receive cleft pallet and lip surgeries, so it was a very touching experience for me to have helped somebody like that. Actually, the China Care Foundation, my roommate and I founded the NYU Chapter while we were at NYU. It's a strong-going club and we help children on a semesterly basis.

My biggest advice for applying to Gilman is to make sure your Follow-On Project is unique and also to continue to go over ideas, because I think that it's probably the part of the essay that makes people stand out the most. You have the opportunity to partner with local and university clubs, or to create a forum, you can create a cultural event; there are so many different options and sometimes I think the easiest ones that come to mind are just creating a little event where you talk about what you did abroad. But, when you can combine the cultural experience you have, or believe you might have, while you're abroad with everything you learned and also involving people in your community who have possibly been to the country you studied in or have some interest in the country, then it gets to be more interesting for everyone involved. So, creating a unique Follow-On program is very necessary.