



## Gilman Alumni Interview Transcript – *Joel Rowe*

My name is Joel Rowe. I was a Gilman Scholarship recipient for the Spring 2008 semester. I went to Senegal and I'm an anthropology major. My program was focused on arts and cultures so that made a lot of sense for me. I'm originally from Jamestown, New York. I study at Fordham University.

I went to Senegal through the School for International Training on an arts and culture program which made sense for my anthropology major. I was actually able to use most of my credits towards my anthropology major. While I was there, I studied the djembe drum. The opportunity to study the djembe drum was one of the reasons I chose the program, because they have an independent study project period at the end of the semester where you're free to study essentially whatever you want that relates to the program. I had always had an interest in the djembe drum, but I never really had access to West Africa to go and actually study it. So having the opportunity to go and work with an actual Senegalese drummer and make the drum and learn how to play the drum.

My goal with the project was really to study the anthropology of pedagogy and I wanted to see if I could extrapolate by way of being an apprentice to a drum master, the themes and the cultural ideas and values that come out of the actual teaching process itself. I'd always been intrigued to play the drum, but I wanted to find out more about what was behind the drum and study abroad was really the only way to do that.

I applied for the Gilman Scholarship at the behest of my study abroad director. He sent out an email to those of us who were studying anywhere, but I know the Gilman focuses more on people who are studying in less traveled and less sought after study abroad destinations. I thought it lined up perfectly. There was a gap between the money that I was able to accrue via my university and through other outside scholarships so the Gilman made sense to apply for outside sources of funding.

My Gilman experience was very satisfying. I was actually contacted while I was abroad through the United States Embassy in Senegal and asked to participate in a program for Senegalese students who are contemplating the idea of studying internationally; which I thought was really interesting, because I came to Senegal in an effort to learn more about Senegalese culture, more about West African culture. So to have the opportunity to speak to students about what American university culture is like was something of great interest. So I participated in the program. We were able to do some lectures to try to introduce students to what American culture is like and what American life in university is like. I feel as though it was a positive experience, because being able to hear it from someone who is actually attending an American university is different than having someone come from the United States Embassy and talk about, "this is an American university." They've probably been to an American university, but to have a situation of empathy to where this is a student who normally studies in the United

States, who studies at a place where I would like to go study, who is here now. Not only does it set up the empathy of age, but it also sets up this idea that these cultures can be exchanged and that there can be positive outcomes because of that. So my Gilman experience was very much influenced by this experience through the Department of State speaking to Senegalese students who are contemplating studying internationally, which was very satisfying.

My Follow-on Project involves speaking to students during new student orientation. I've noticed over the years in being an orientation leader at my university that there's a great interest when students come to attend Fordham University that they're very interested in travelling. There's a global outreach program, but they're also very interested in taking their studies internationally. So I thought it would be a good time to kind of capitalize on that interest, not only to promote the Gilman Scholarship, but to promote study abroad in general and the idea that the classroom doesn't just need to be your home university and that going and interacting and exchanging with another culture can be a very efficient and certainly unique way to enhance your education. So, I did a presentation on my experience when I was abroad in Senegal, studying the djembe through the School for International Training and this kind of hands-on, immersive, experiential kind of learning and how that differs from what you learn in a classroom, academic setting in the United States. I feel as though it positively affected the student body that I was reaching out to, because coming to the university is such a liminal, weird stage where you're trying to get acclimated and you're trying to make new friends. All these ideas and interests are percolating in your head about what you want your educational experience to be. So to expose students to this idea that studying abroad is not only possible, but this is what can happen if you study abroad; these are the realizations that you can begin to cultivate. I feel as though it was positively influential.

My Gilman experience has positively affected both my personal life and my professional life. I've noticed that it's something that people ask about in job or internship interviews. It's a nice thing to have on there, because it's becoming more and more well-known what the Gilman Scholarship is and what the Gilman Scholarship is about. Being able to talk about how it enhanced my study abroad experience and how studying abroad enhanced my world view served to begin to broaden my worldview. It's something that I think people value, especially in an increasingly globalized culture; this idea of not being fluent in every culture because that's obviously impossible, but having the beginnings of a tool set that's necessary to try to navigate other cultures; to do things sensitively, to do things with empathy – that's something that employers and graduate programs certainly value.

If I could offer any advice to potential Gilman applicants, it would be to certainly move ahead with the application process. Studying abroad can be a very challenging endeavor, especially in terms of, "Which is the right program for me? How do I want to navigate my credits? Where would I like to place this relative to my larger undergraduate education?" The first step is obviously picking the right program and that would be my first bit of advice. Finding the program that is right for you is well more than half the battle, pre-departure speaking. Once you find the right program, obviously you

need to find a way to pay for it and the Gilman Scholarship is one of those unique opportunities, especially for those who study abroad to less traveled destinations that actually seek out that kind of student body.

In terms of applying for the scholarship, if I could offer any advice it's to spend a good amount of time reflecting as you write. Definitely go through lots of drafts with the application essay, because letting things kind of ruminate in your head, allowing yourself time to reflect on what you've written so far and what your goals and aspirations are in terms of studying abroad – what you'd actually like to attain from the experience. That, I think is a good bit of advice to people who are going through the application process. Now, it can be daunting not only to study abroad, but to find a way to fund things. The more you reflect on yourself and what you really want out of your experience, the more fluid your essay will be, the more well-constructed and sincere your essay will be, which I am pretty confident is one of the chief factors in choosing Gilman Scholars.