



## **Gilman Alumni Interview Transcript – Luis Garcia**

Hi my name is Luis Garcia and last year, in 2008, I received a Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship to go to Thailand. I was in Mae Hong Sung, Thailand, which is in the northern part of Thailand on the border of Thailand and Burma.

I was a high school English teacher at a high school for refugees in the military area. We arrived in Mae Hong Sung, which is a city in Thailand, and we were taken from there to Nai Soi and I was a teacher at the community learning center of Nai Soi along with other teachers from my college, Evergreen State College. Five days a week we were full time English teachers and so that meant that we had to create our lesson plans at night and then during the day we would each teach for three hours. Many of our students spoke a number of other different languages. Some of them were actually learning English as their fifth language, because in Burma, where they're from, they speak about 120 different languages. So these students were very good at picking up English, and were somewhat intimidating, actually, with how many languages they each spoke. While we were there, we also volunteered as teachers at the first ever government school English camp and these were younger students. We taught high school students but at the English camp we were dealing with students that were between the ages of 5 and 10 years old.

The reason I applied for a Gilman is because I knew I wanted to study abroad and I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do, but I was lucky enough to have heard about a program at my school that was a 2 credit class about study abroad and the Gilman was one of the scholarships that they let us know about. Through taking that class, I started looking at different options about where I could go and what I could do. I ended up in a program that had a list of internships, and one of them was in Thailand. So I secured the internship, then applied for the Gilman what I had learned from the class that I took. I didn't know if I'd be able to go unless I got the

Gilman actually and it was three weeks before I was actually suppose to be leaving that I got my Gilman letter and was able to go.

I thoroughly enjoyed my Gilman experience and it is probably the best thing that I was able to do with my B.A. It was the last thing I did with my B.A. as well, so I felt very lucky to have been granted the Scholarship.

Well, I had decided to go to Thailand on the Thai-Burma border and one of the most difficult things about teaching there is that there are so many different languages spoken in Burma and most of my students, although we were in Thailand, were from Burma, so they would often be speaking in a number of different languages that I did not know and I did not know much Thai, even though I had taken some classes and picked up a little bit. But, it was rewarding to be able to breakthrough and be able to eventually communicate with them and to hear them speaking back in English. Me being able to learn some of the languages they spoke, even though I wouldn't necessarily be able to tell you what those languages are now. It was particularly rewarding to be working at this high school. It was a high school that was started by a Burmese refugee and at the time that I was there, which was only three years old, had its first graduation, and as one of the teachers I was there for their graduation, even though there have been many other teachers and myself. Me and the other teachers were there in February last year were at the graduation and we all felt that that was a big deal and very proud to be there and to be able to supply photographs and video for the school of the graduation as well. I still am in contact with my students and some people who are still teaching in there. It was a great experience and I think I'm going to be going back there at some point.

Well, while I was in Thailand, I was able to conduct a number of interviews; ethnographic research is what my professor would call it. I interviewed the founder of the school that I was teaching at, as well as some other teachers and his family and some people in the area. I haven't been able to yet edit all the videos that I would like to, but I intend to show some of these videos to students and to put them online as well. Part of what I've already done for my Follow-on Project was that I was interviewed by my school's alumni magazine and I got to talk to them about the Gilman and about my trip to Thailand and they did a little special insert on the Gilman actually, because the school that I went to received 14 Gilman Scholarships, I believe, 14 exactly, the year that I went, and wanted to publicize it and the study

abroad programs. In addition to the videos I took in Thailand, I gave each one of my students in each one of my classes disposable cameras. All of them took pictures of what their lives were like and what they see and they obviously got to see a lot more than what I was allowed to see while I was there. I have all of their photographs and it is my intention to eventually be able to display them somewhere and hopefully raise money for the school.

Well my general advice for anyone who'd like to apply to the Gilman, first of all is to do it. It is worth the time that it takes to prepare your application. There are two essays on it and I can understand that that can be intimidating – it intimidated me, but take your time. Write your essays, have somebody read them over, listen to their advice. I was lucky enough to have some people read my essays to help me find those typos you can't find on your own and just to hear what it sounded like. So do it.