Isabelle Feldhaus, South Africa, 2010

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My semester studying abroad at the University of Cape Town proved to be one of the most enlightening and rewarding of my college career. Cape Town's powerful history of apartheid and reconstruction, diverse culture, ongoing development, and considerable global health burden comprised an ideal setting in which to explore my varied interests within topics of human rights, international development, and HIV/AIDS. As I explored the country's museums, experienced an array of rich cultures, and encountered a wholly different political environment, I found that I learned more about the world as well as about myself when I ventured outside of the classroom.

The nature of my volunteer work at People Against Suffering, Oppression, and Poverty (PASSOP), a local nonprofit human rights organization, and the Brooklyn TB Chest Hospital, a facility serving those who cannot afford tuberculosis care and treatment, gave direct insights into the lives of a majority of South Africans. Through these roles, I experienced first-hand the operation of the South African health system. PASSOP introduced me to the challenges of policy development amidst a diverse and volatile population, while my position at the hospital demonstrated the implementation of national healthcare policies. Perceiving an intense need for health systems development focused on traditionally underserved communities solidified my commitment to work in international health. Building lifelong friendships, shaping my worldviews, and inspiring my current academic and professional goals, my experiences in South Africa set a course for my life in the field of global public health and policy.

Before entering college, I knew that I wanted to study abroad. However, despite passion and drive, I realize that the incredible experiences I had in Cape Town would have been impossible without the funding granted through the Gilman Scholarship. The exceptional opportunities that have arisen as a result of my participation as a Gilman Scholar have proven to be critical in shaping my academic and career paths today. As I pursue my life goals further, I am continuing my studies and further research in international health systems at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Working to improve health systems and policies in low- and middle-income countries, I am excited to make my own positive impact upon the world as a conscious global citizen continuing to learn through global service.

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Follow-on Service Project

My Follow-on Service Project was a research paper presented at a school-wide study abroad fair and selected campus organizations. Inspired by a young girl at Brooklyn TB Chest Hospital, I focused on the national health system with regard to its capacity to address HIV/TB co-infection as a major driver of morbidity and mortality in South Africa. Upon graduation, my home institution recognized me as a USC Global Scholar for my work, awarding me with a $10,000 grant toward graduate studies. Through these outlets, I inspired study abroad participants to study in non-traditional and diverse destinations.