Gilman International Scholarship Program



Jose Vergara Russia, Academic Year 2009-2010

University of Missouri, Columbia Russian Languages and Literature Texas



My study abroad in Moscow, Russia was my most fulfilling college experience. My interest in Russian began my freshman year at the University of Missouri, Columbia when I enrolled in a course on Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and was immediately enthralled by Russian literature. The following semester I became a Russian major. I plan to attend graduate school for Russian literature, so my study abroad in Russia was critical to improving my grasp of the language and experiencing firsthand the culture to which I hope to devote my academic and professional career.

I opted for the home-stay option and lived with an elderly pensioner, who helped me with my Russian language. Though I have studied Russian language for a number of years, I still found myself living in a very unfamiliar place. As I improved my language skills, I was able to fully immerse myself into the culture. My academic experience with the GRINT Institute at the Moscow University for the Humanities was excellent, consisting of intensive language courses and classes on culture and politics.

For my Follow-on Service Project, I spoke to Advanced Placement classes at my former high school about Russia, study abroad, and the Gilman Scholarship. I described the importance of looking into funding options, such as the Gilman Scholarship. My presentation covered a diverse array of topics, such as food, lifestyles, transportation, housing, schooling, and literature, in order to present a broad picture of the study abroad experience. One class was studying Russian literature, so I was able to incorporate my knowledge of Russian writers into the presentation. Students were engaged during the presentations and I was happy to have the opportunity to convey the importance of cultural exchange. During my time in Russia, the need for cultural exchange became apparent. Without cultural knowledge, ignorance and stereotypes will continue to exist.

Receiving the Gilman Scholarship helped me tremendously. I had not been outside of the U.S. since moving to the U.S. from Bogota, Colombia when I was six years old. My mother, a single parent, lost one of her two jobs before I went abroad. In addition, she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, limiting her work opportunities. Receiving the Gilman Scholarship is both a deeply appreciated honor and an economic relief that helped me achieve many of my academic, personal, and career goals. Studying in Moscow was a complete reaffirmation of my interest in Russian language, literature, and culture.

Jose Vergara is currently a graduate student in Russian Literature.