

## Gilman International Scholarship Program



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Initially, the immersion process was difficult in Argentina. I was living with an Argentine family and surrounded by people speaking Spanish so fast I could barely keep up! However, as my language skills improved, I became more immersed in the culture. This made my study abroad the most rewarding and eye opening experience of my life. I felt I was a part of the Argentine culture, which is a culture like no other I have experienced.

While in Buenos Aires, I volunteered with *HelpArgentina*, an organization that works to bring volunteers and funding to over 70 nonprofit organizations in Argentina. These organizations focus on the whole spectrum of social issues such as education, environmental sustainability, health care, and economic development. Through this, I was able to gain an over-arching view of the social issues facing impoverished communities of Argentina. Many times students' study abroad experiences are filled with the tourist attractions of the country; however, I appreciated the opportunity to see another side of Argentina.

Working with *HelpArgentina* opened my eyes to the disparities abroad, specifically in the area of health. I want to go into the field of Public Health and work to implement intervention and prevention strategies to improve health outcomes of communities. Since studying in Argentina, I went on a community service trip to Belize where we taught health education and life skills to disadvantaged young women. While it was a heartbreaking experience, it was also a rewarding one; I realized that this type of work is what I am called to do. Studying abroad in Argentina diminished my fear of going to new places and engaging with people of other cultures. It embedded in me a spirit of curiosity but also a desire to make change. I can definitely say that my study abroad experience has impacted the direction I am taking in my professional career.

While my institution fosters a supportive environment for students to seek study abroad opportunities, some students are still apprehensive. For my Gilman Follow-on Service Project, I started a newsletter in which students returning from study abroad would be able to share their experiences. The newsletter included information such as application tips, host family experiences, and immersion stories. It also featured an article on how the Gilman Scholarship has influenced past recipients. It is my hope that the newsletter will become a tradition and each semester there is one published highlighting returning study abroad participants.

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