



Gilman Alumni Representative

Cynthia Gomez

Brazil, Fall 2008
University of California, Berkeley



From the day I arrived, to the day I left, I enjoyed every minute of my study abroad in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. I was lucky to participate in a program that was extremely organized, had great resources, and was run by people who truly care about their participants. One of the best parts of my study abroad program was my home stay, which was an integral part of the program. Although I learned a lot in the classroom it was during my conversations at lunch and dinner with my home stay mom where I learned more than you could ever find listed under a course description. I was able to practice my Portuguese and learn from a primary source about the customs and eccentricities of Brazilian culture.

I chose Brazil because I wanted to learn a new language, and with no previous experience with Portuguese I was determined to learn as much as I possibly could. Academically, the language course was a highlight of the program because of the wonderful professor and the small classroom setting. In just a couple of months I became almost fluent in a language I had never studied before! In addition to the rewarding experiences in the classroom, I also was able to volunteer teaching dance classes to young girls at a non-profit organization, which seeks to empower women of color through music and the arts. Although it was challenging given the limited space and resources available for us, it was both humbling and inspiring to see the enthusiasm of the young girls when they were given the opportunity to express themselves.

My Follow-on Project consisted of focused outreach through a non-profit, Stiles Hall, which provides resources and services to students in underrepresented communities transferring to and attending the University of California, Berkeley. My main goal was to inform and encourage transfer students about the possibility of incorporating study abroad into their undergraduate experience. Informing them about the funding available through the Gilman Scholarship also makes study abroad seem more accessible. I know my project has had a positive impact on students. In fact, after hearing so much about my experience, my brother and his girlfriend made the decision to participate in the same program I completed. They are now both Gilman Scholars who studied abroad in Brazil during the fall 2009 semester.



Cynthia snaps a photo in front of the Sugarloaf in Rio de Janeiro

I feel so privileged to have been able to study abroad, and grateful for the funding that helped make it possible through the Gilman Scholarship. I believe it is extremely important for students to have the opportunity to incorporate international education into their studies; it is an invaluable experience. Having studied abroad in Brazil has exposed me to new interests and possibilities; I want to continue my study of Portuguese language and hope to someday work in Brazil. Although I have always known I wanted to go to graduate school, after returning from Brazil I have broadened my interest in graduate programs, looking at international relations programs of schools like Columbia and Princeton. This will prove beneficial for my interest in a career as a Foreign Affairs Officer.



While in Brazil, Cynthia visited the Iguazu Falls, considered one of the world's largest

Currently, Cynthia works with a university as an admissions counselor.