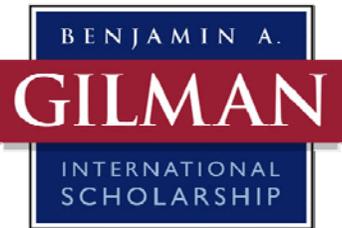


## AMARYLIS VELEZ-PEREZ, SPAIN, 2007

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**S**tudying abroad early in my academic training played a pivotal role in understanding the importance of developing global awareness. Many of the biggest problems that we face globally will require interdisciplinary knowledge to effectively tackle them. As a doctoral student in neuroscience, I see how many of the skills that I acquired abroad have parallels with good scientific thinking.

How does our environment shape our brain? This is one of the fundamental questions that the academic field of neuroscience has been interested in answering for quite a long time. This question was also the catalyst for my interest in studying abroad. As an undergraduate, I knew that my professional interests lay in the study and understanding of external influences on the brain. However, I was aware of the fact that my department lacked an offering of courses and faculty with expertise on the study of behavior from a biological perspective. This awareness

triggered my motivation to search for opportunities to learn more about the brain in the context of learning. The Gilman Scholarship gave me the opportunity to explore my professional interests and in this process I found where my passion lay. My study abroad experience shaped my professional and career path in ways that I had not anticipated.

The notion of cognition as the result of biological activity in the brain fascinated me as an undergraduate. I wanted to learn more about plasticity of the brain from a biological perspective and I chose the University of Salamanca (USAL) in Spain for my study abroad experience. The USAL emerged as an attractive institution to study abroad because it houses the Institute of Neuroscience of Castilla and Leon. Their expertise in neuroscience, the facilities and collaborations with researchers in countries around the world was an excellent opportunity to learn about the neuroscience field. I took several courses that introduced me to the study of the brain from a biological perspective. After my experience abroad I was fascinated by the study of the biological mechanisms of behavior and decided that this was the area that I wanted to pursue for my career. I literally fell in love with the

brain and its malleability. Receiving the Gilman Scholarship created a bridge that allowed me to meet what would become my academic and professional passion.

I am currently a doctoral student in a neuroscience and behavior program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. My decision to apply to graduate school was strengthened by my study abroad experience. My initial interest in learning styles, my first-exposure to a diverse audience at USAL, and experiencing a different curriculum allowed me to bring back home an increased proficiency at communicating the fascinating world of science to the diverse population that distinguishes U.S. institutions. I published a paper in collaboration with my undergraduate advisors on strategies to introduce neuroscience to underrepresented students in a peer-reviewed journal. Furthermore, I was awarded a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship to pursue my doctoral degree. One of the reasons why I applied to this fellowship is because it provides a platform for potential scientific training abroad and research collaborations that I am very interested in pursuing. Studying abroad not only challenged and expanded my vision of the world but it also allowed me to discover where my passion was.

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

I joined the Olé-RUM Program as a peer mentor, which was created to promote student exchange with universities of Spain and to develop initiatives that propelled

internationalization of the education system. I was able to identify potential Gilman Scholarship applicants and offer advice regarding the Gilman Scholarship application

process. Additionally, I created a blog and was interviewed by my university to help inform the larger student body of my experiences abroad.