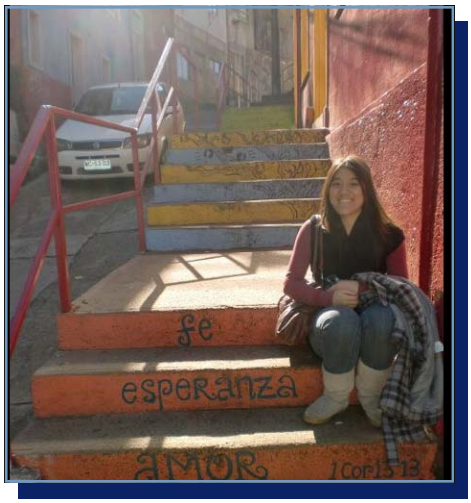
Cindy La, Chile, 2011

University of California, Los Angeles
California



In a city as vibrant as Santiago, I never doubted that I would have memorable experiences, but I never dreamed that I would love a place so much that wasn't my hometown. My spirit of adventure brought me closer to the locals and eager to see the city come alive. The thought of being far away from home never registered into my mind until that first morning when I awoke not to the sound of an alarm, but rather to a thunderous boom of jostling feet and shrill cries from an escalating Chilean student protest. Something about the student movement touched me personally and humbled me deeply - students were protesting their rights for an education, while I had the blessings of further broadening my educational experience abroad.

I have so much to be thankful for and I take away memories that will accompany throughout my lifetime. The route to school - either on foot or by metro - became a journey in and of itself with statues, eccentric casts of musicians, vendors, and crazy drivers. Even the small laboratory spaces of Universidad Andrés Bello, where I studied microbiology, has given me new insight about different research methodologies and techniques in different parts of the world. These experiences studying with amazing professors have academically enhanced my career plans by furthering my interest in microbiology and research. I have learned to immerse myself in a language and culture where I can practice my Spanish and navigate through cultural barriers, something that I hope to do as a physician.

I am so grateful for the opportunities that the Gilman Scholarship has opened for me, and am so proud to be an alumna of a program that invests so much in the future generations of study abroad students. As a pre-medical student, finding a way to fit a study abroad program into my schedule was quite a challenge, but the Gilman Scholarship willingly accommodated my summer program. They provided me with the financial assistance to help alleviate the high costs of studying abroad and they have given me the necessary tools to encourage others to pursue similar dreams.

I can summarize my experience in a borrowed phrase by Henry Miller: "One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things." Traveling outside of the U.S., I realized how limited my worldview was, and how much more I had to learn about other cultures, traditions, and pastimes. I saw my world through a different perspective, and coming back to America, I have tried to be less insular and more curious about the world around me.

> ***"Even the small laboratory spaces of Universidad Andrés Bello where I studied microbiology gave me new insights about different research methodologies and techniques in different parts of the world. "***

Follow-on Service Project

As someone who sees travel as a gateway to adventure and self-discovery, my Follow-on Service project aimed to share what I learned through study abroad through a blog and presentations. I conducted presentations for STEM students, in-coming freshmen college students, and students in high school. Few people realize the wealth of diverse programs offered: classes that can count towards general education requirements, language requirements, or major requirements. I also presented at the UCLA Study Abroad Fair for students who wanted to learn more about my particular program.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs