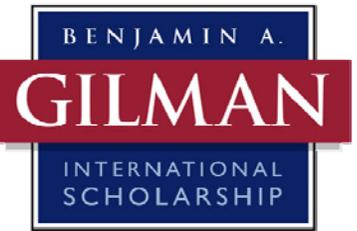


KARYN COMEAU, JAPAN, 2008

Mount Holyoke College
Massachusetts



in rural Massachusetts. I set my sights on going to a Japanese university with one of the most rigorous language programs.

Every day consisted of three to four hours of language instruction, and every night consisted of studying for daily vocabulary

quizzes. Between taking an intensive language class and my daily life in Japan, my written and oral comprehension improved drastically. I was able to hold my own in conversations like I was never able to before.

I decided to live in a public dorm rather than a home stay. I found that this gave me an opportunity to interact with a large group of people, from various areas within Japan and as well as those attending different universities. Through my peers I was introduced to activities such as visiting Shinto shrines to make wishes as well as going to karaoke to sing Japanese songs. Just as I was excited about cultural

exchange, there were also many people who were interested in learning about life in the United States. In a rather unexpected turn of events, I introduced my Japanese peers to the microwave popcorn and California rolls. While learning about Japanese culture I began to look at my own background through a different lens.

"I knew that in order to achieve a higher level of fluency I would have to pursue Japanese beyond what I could do in rural Massachusetts."

I find that the year I spent studying abroad taught me many things. I became more aware of myself and the assumptions and beliefs I hold because of my background. I learned to let go of these assumptions, and to see things from a different perspective. As I made a place for myself in Tokyo, a city of millions, I came to appreciate my ability to adapt and thrive in foreign environments. The self-reliance and confidence that I gained abroad still serves to help me to this day.

I have always been interested in learning languages. Throughout my youth I enjoyed studying Spanish and Chinese. When I found that my college offered Japanese, I jumped at the opportunity to broaden my linguistic horizons. I devoured everything that I could get my hands on: Japanese music, television and language exchange. I found that my language skills were not progressing as quickly as I wanted. I heard that the easiest and most effective way to learn a language is through immersion. With this in mind, I knew that in order to achieve a higher level of fluency I would have to pursue Japanese beyond what I could do

FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

Upon my return to the United States, I collaborated with other students to create a website dedicated to studying abroad in

Asia with a focus on the Gilman Scholarship. I also dedicated time each semester to present to those interested in studying abroad. As

a Gilman Alumni Representative, I am hoping to reach out to even more people who are interested in studying abroad.