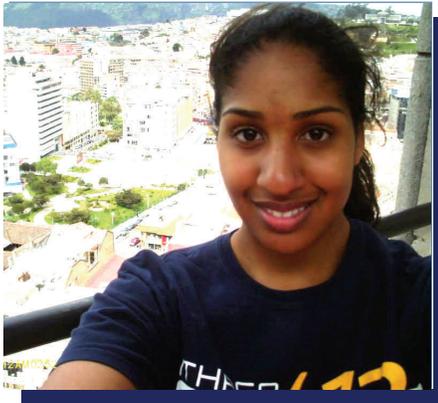
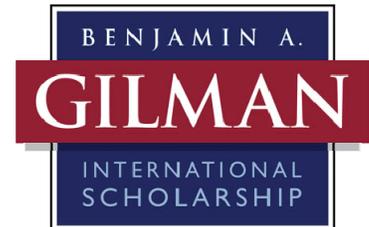


# KATHERINE BOWEN, ECUADOR, 2011

Ithaca College  
New York



**A**s a child, I always had an interest in exploring cultures and celebrating diversity. Thanks to the Gilman International Scholarship, I had the opportunity to spend a semester abroad in Ecuador, which was a truly life changing experience.

While studying abroad, I attended Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador in partnership with IES Abroad. As a participant in the program I was able to visit the Galapagos Islands and the Amazon Rainforest as well as arrange my own independent trips to other cities and towns across the country. Studying abroad is a great opportunity to challenge yourself and to gain a new perspective on the experiences you have back

home. Being embraced by another culture teaches you about the one you are most familiar with. It was an eye-opener and has inspired me to dedicate my own career to encouraging cross-cultural learning.

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In addition to my regular coursework abroad, I enrolled in a music academy. Every weekend I attended classical performance classes, and it was a great challenge! Music acted as the foundation for bridging the communication gaps between myself and the other students. The academy was a great opportunity to realize the different roles music plays in society and provided great insight into Ecuador's cultural diversity.

To engage with even more local Ecuadorians, I volunteered as an English tutor teaching courses to university students. Talk about another challenge! I enjoyed fumbling over their questions and trying to explain the meaning behind certain phrases or expressions, which to native speakers may seem natural but went against some of the grammar rules my pupils were taught. These sessions were a great space for myself and other students to share stories with one another while learning together.

The friends I made abroad inspired me in many ways. Even though a couple of years have passed since I studied abroad, I still maintain close relationships with them. This summer I returned to Ecuador and reconnected with friends and visited my host family, whom I consider my extended family. I am no longer intimidated by language and cultural barriers, which has allowed me to pursue further travel around the world. I am forever appreciative of the opportunities for personal growth the Gilman International Scholarship provided.

## FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

My Follow-on Service Project had three parts. First, I participated in a panel discussion at Ithaca College for students interested in studying abroad in Spanish-speaking countries. Second, I wrote an article published by my study abroad program. Third, I

spent a day volunteering with students in a Spanish class at my former elementary school. My stories and experiences seemed to inspire a curiosity and enthusiasm in those I spoke with. I was especially excited that the younger students had a keen interest in

learning about other cultures. A common concern I found in students looking to study abroad pertained to financial aid, and I highly recommended the Gilman Scholarship Program as a potential resource.